# TORONTO LIFE

Elon Musk, the Ontario years P.44

Dunk contest: the city's best fondues P.71

The Toronto fitness influencers taking over TikTok P.61

My life as a skinhead: a memoir P.50

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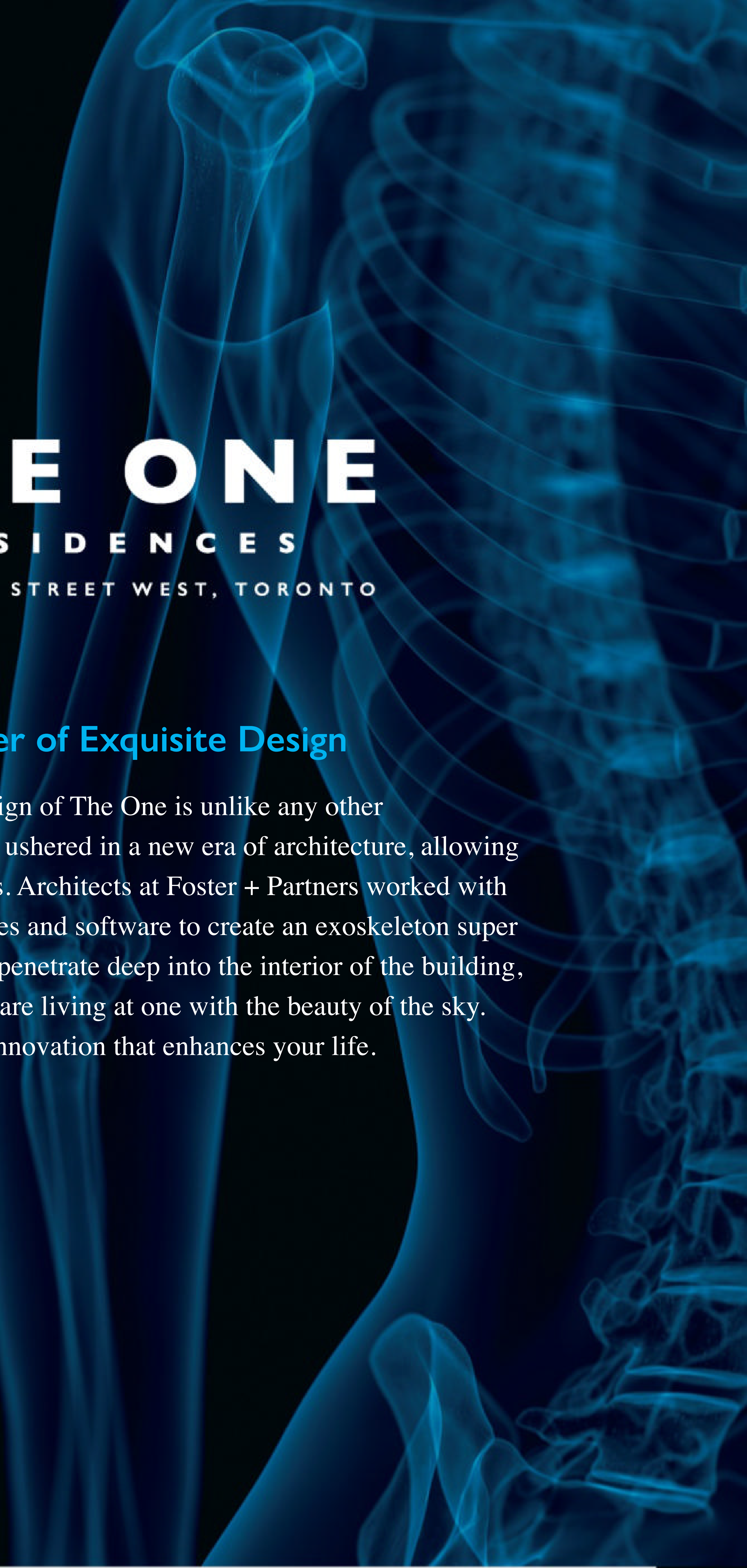

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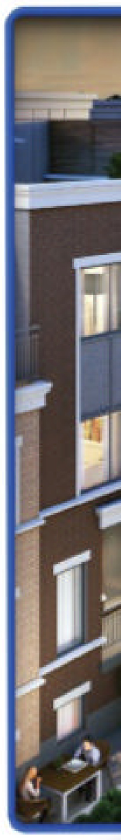

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The ultimate winter comfort food, from South-Western Bathhouse and Tea Room, P. 76

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# THE CONVERSATION

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The manhunt for a Ferrari-racing fugitive
John Irving on sexual politics, tattooing and the rise of the religious right
One family, two quadruple organ transplants
The city's best private chefs
REAL ESTATE SPECIAL 2022
They left. They regretted it. Now they're back.
THE BIG RETURN
Trading Toronto for more square footage outside the city seemed like a great idea at the time.
TRUE TALES FROM THE HOMECOMING CLUB

The couple that dreamed of more space

"I FELT ISOLATED FROM MY MOM AND MY FRIENDS"

**Happy Returns**
Our November cover story mapped the trajectories of Torontonians who left the city during the pandemic but decided, for various reasons, to reverse course. Reader response was divided—mainly between people who would never contemplate such a move and those who already left and never looked back.

"Kudos to the prodigal Torontonians who were able to get back on the Toronto property ladder. The longer, sadder twin article would have the headline 'They left, they regretted it, they're stuck.' "
—*Luke Jackson*

"Somebody needs to break it to these families that *Schitt's Creek* is fiction—and even the Roses got out of Dodge."
—*Sue Gunther, Facebook*

"I am always stunned by these stories of naïve people who left the city for remote communities during the pandemic, thinking they could work from home forever, and are now shocked that they have to come in to work. Did they think Covid was a never-ending situation? Wildly short-sighted."
—*Josh Laing, Facebook*

"Brief synopsis: people who love Toronto moved away from Toronto but were disappointed that their new town wasn't Toronto, so they moved back to Toronto."
—*Carrying Place Ontario, Facebook*

"Different conditions for us. We moved to the Niagara region (south of Vineland). Our take is that country life rocks. We'd never move back to Toronto. Life is very good here."
—*Geoff Charabin, Facebook*

"Different strokes for different folks. I moved to the burbs in 2019 after 10 years in a condo downtown. I am much happier in the suburbs. I'm just not a city person."
—*@bricksnmortar13, Twitter*

"Parts of this piece sound like a new horror series on Netflix. 'They were ready to go home, but the town wasn't ready for them to leave.' "
—*adammrobertson, Instagram*

"For every person who hated small-town life, there are two others questioning why they didn't do it sooner."
—*funkstop, Instagram*

"Oh, the reverse exodus. That's a nice change."
—*syd_free, Instagram*

"Nope. Never coming back. Covid gutted Toronto."
—*robinkeithmccallum, Instagram*

"People regretted not having to sit on the nasty-ass TTC and pay $1.5 million for a house that needs to be gutted?"
—*dave_blr, Instagram*

"I grew up in PEC, and whenever I mention it to Torontonians, they're shocked that I left the county for the big city. A lot of people seem to romanticize rural life without thinking too deeply about it. The county is beautiful (my family is still there, so I visit often), but it's a rural area. A lot of the luxuries we have in the city simply aren't available there. You don't have much choice when it comes to schools, daycares, doctors, etc. There's no real public transit, so you need to have a car that can handle winter weather. Hell, when I go home for more than a few days, I start to miss having so many delivery options, which is such a first-world problem, but it's something I'm used to having access to.

"I have mixed feelings about how much the county is expanding. On the one hand, I'm glad that the community is getting revitalized with new folks coming in (the fact that there are drag shows playing at a venue that used to just be a place for underage kids to get drunk is mind-boggling). But, on the other hand, it's almost insulting that people show up and are shocked that the rural community they've moved to is, in fact, rural. I try to go to bat for 'those city people' whenever I'm home chatting with neighbours, but man do y'all make it difficult sometimes."

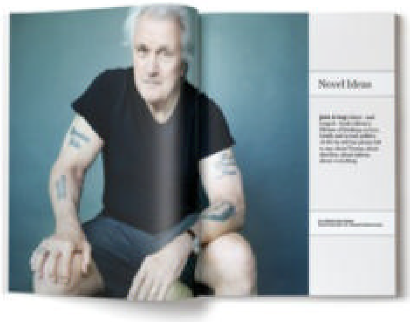
*—astamar, Reddit*

"I wonder how many people 'escaped' Toronto during the pandemic with nothing but money and a fantasy. So many people pop up on Reddit looking for doctors, places to eat, daycares, things to do...after they've moved. A lot of people seem to think switching towns is like a plug-in-and-play kind of game. Add the speed of the internet and the impatience and restlessness of Torontonians and you get stories like this. It's frustrating and messy."

*—Live_Replacement_977, Reddit*

"As someone who moved to Toronto from a small town, I'd never go back, ever, for any price. The houses may be cheaper, but there are zero amenities, the jobs pay poorly and good luck getting a doctor. There's nothing to do unless you love sports bars and driving. People really underestimate how much they depend on decent infrastructure and actual community when they decide they're going to leave the city."

*—ToasterPops, Reddit*



**Chapter and Verse**

There's a lot of love for John Irving out there. Readers were almost as excited about our November issue's long-form Q&A with him—and the revelations it contained—as they were about his new novel.

"Man, I love John Irving."

*—@J_Scott_, Twitter*

"I knew John Irving and Robertson Davies had a mutual affinity but didn't know Davies had reviewed *The Hotel New Hampshire* for the *Washington Post* in 1981. Amazingly, the review is online, and the writing is just delightfully exquisite."

*—@Fleischmarket, Twitter*

"I will never not love John Irving! (I don't want Billy Wilder's old hat either.) His new book, which I am halfway through, is wonderful, and this interview is exactly right!"

*—@TheBlackHoof, Twitter*

"Oh, what a treat!"

*—justjanews, Instagram*

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“My favourite author!”
—*indelibleadventures, Instagram*

“I have loved him since I read *A Prayer for Owen Meany* in high school (finished it in two days).”
—*bexer44, Instagram*

“OMG, John Irving! *Toronto Life* has finally stepped it up a notch. Great read.”
—*notes_from_suburbia, Instagram*

“So very excited to read John Irving’s latest book. He is my favourite author!”
—*gailbornstein, Instagram*

“One of my all-time favourite writers. Looking forward to reading his newest.”
—*fabian.tobin, Instagram*

“Have my copy on preorder. Looking forward to the release.”
—*a_gemstone, Instagram*

## Shelf Life

Readers had strong feelings about our Q&A with new Indigo CEO Peter Ruis. Most of them had to do with wanting more books and fewer tchotchkes.

“I get that they’re trying to remain relevant, but I’m not impressed.”
—*@Gray_Plume, Twitter*

“I like spending time in Indigo looking at books and buying books. But there is too much other stuff. The one at Sherway is so crammed with yoga mats and pillows that you can’t get to the book sections.”
—*jlow_79, Instagram*

“You’ve wrecked the joy of just visiting a bookstore, exploring and finding peace in that.”
—*hudsonxyz, Instagram*

“I look forward to seeing the new and radical ways in which I can buy a book.”
—*rllubelsk, Instagram*

“You are listening to your shareholders, not readers. These stores used to build community.”
—*colleenpierceprice, Instagram*

There was at least one fan, though.

“Cool article with details on an amazing new place to buy books and music here in downtown Toronto. I love browsing for books.”
—*@JessTaylorHRH, Twitter*

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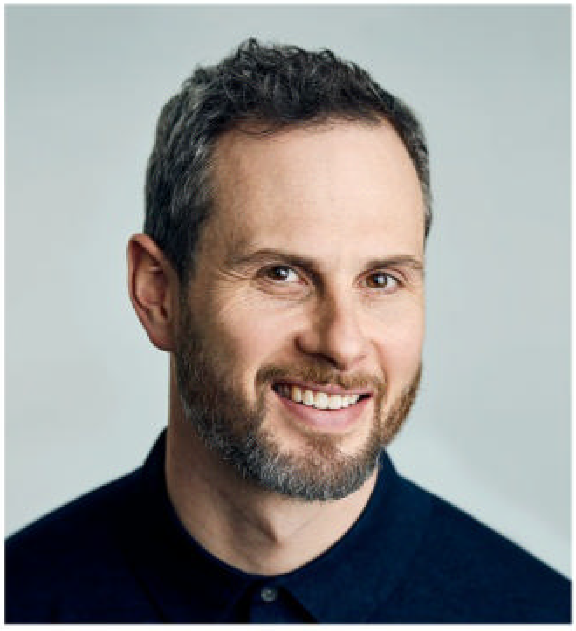
# EDITOR'S LETTER

## The Real Cost of the Rental Wars

In 2018, I moderated a roundtable on the state of the real estate market. One of the participants, a prominent agent, was candid about where he saw things heading. Toronto, he said, was becoming like Manhattan: a place for renters, not owners. As a city approaches greatness, density increases—all those people drawn to all that greatness—competition ramps up and the dream of home ownership fades. Torontonians just hadn't realized it yet.



Was he right? Back then, the cost per square foot to buy a condo was $1,000. Today, it's roughly $1,400. So, yes, he had a point. But here's what he didn't see coming: renting has become equally unaffordable. That's a problem with frightening implications for every Torontonian.

For this month's cover story, "Give Me Shelter" (page 33), *Toronto Life*'s deputy editor, Lauren McKeon, oversaw a team of reporters who dug deep into the high costs and subpar conditions for renters. The stories that came back were shocking.

Just getting started in the rental game is demoralizing. Right now, apartment hunters have to compete with a swarm of suitors just for the chance to rent. Palm-greasing and frantic upbidding are common. And what prospective renters are fighting over often isn't all that special: sometimes it's a dumpy one-bedroom in an ordinary building. For all that trouble? The privilege of handing over a staggering $2,481—the average rent for a one-bedroom when we went to press—every month. The lucky renter then lives in constant fear of being renovicted, having the rent jacked up with little notice (for any building completed in late 2018 or afterward) or being made to feel so unwelcome in their home that they choose to leave. When they do, they've accrued no equity—they've only lined someone else's pocket. Then the process repeats itself, but this time, they'll probably pay even more money for less square footage.

Any urban planner worth listening to knows that the key to a thriving metropolis is variety. No one would want to live in a city of only skyscrapers, just as a city of only single-family detached homes is shapeless and forgettable. By the same token, a city that's accessible only to the wealthy is soulless, sterile and boring. Unless something changes, Toronto, for all its success stories and points of pride, risks becoming just that: a city where only the upper-percenters can afford to stick around. This phenomenon used to be called "the missing middle"; now it's more like the missing two-thirds. That's a massive, indispensable group that includes people from all walks of life—the young, the old, entrepreneurs, artists, risk takers, dreamers, future luminaries and icons. If they can't stay, we all lose so much.

This problem emerges elsewhere in this issue. As Mayor Tory tells us on page 28, his number-one priority for his third term is tackling the affordability crisis. As actor Andrew Phung says in his Q&A (page 24), the suburbs and parts beyond—Hamilton, Scarborough, Pickering, Stouffville—have become sanctuaries for creative, innovative, entrepreneurial expat Torontonians who have been priced out of their city.

Remedies are as varied as the people who support them. Premier Ford wants to pave over parts of the Greenbelt (a solution that begets more problems); Mayor Tory wants to send affordable housing into hyperdrive. Housing advocates are clamouring for stricter rent control; developers insist that rent control would decrease the supply of rental stock. The clock is ticking. For the people we interviewed, some kind of relief—in whatever form—can't come soon enough.

**—Malcolm Johnston**
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**COMING UP**
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PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL EHRENWORTH

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Celebrity chef Matty Matheson, No. 11, with Ian Rosen, president and COO of Harry Rosen

MOST INFLUENTIAL
TL50
Juno- and Polaris-winning musician Haviah Mighty with her sister and collaborator, Omega Mighty

Notisha Massaquoi (right), an assistant professor at the University of Toronto and this year's No. 37 for leading the advisory board that developed the Toronto Police Service's new race-based data collection policy

Shopify VP Satish Kanwar and angel investor Arati Sharma

# THE TL50 MOST INFLUENTIAL 2022

TORONTO LIFE

On the evening of November 17, *Toronto Life* hosted its annual celebration of the city's most influential people at Harry Rosen in Yorkville. Superstar chef Matty Matheson, *Jeopardy!* champ Mattea Roach, publishing powerhouse Kristin Cochrane and other city-shaping personalities turned out to toast a year's worth of accomplishments.

Brampton's Haviah and Omega Mighty performed while guests danced and enjoyed Louis Roederer Champagne, Tanqueray No. Ten gin martinis, cocktails from World Class Canada and wine by J. Lebegue. Non-alcoholic drinks were provided by Seedlip. Karine Joncas and Basic Maintenance Lab provided gifting.

**FOR FULL PARTY COVERAGE, VISIT**
torontolife.com/city/influential2022

Scott Vanderwel (left) and Nick Sulsky (right) of PointsBet flanking actor Dax Ravina and artist-management professional Sheila Roberts

TSN reporter Rick Westhead, who made No. 22 for his investigation into Hockey Canada, with his wife and friends

Universal Music Canada CEO Jeffrey Remedios, No. 19, chats with Mayor John Tory, No. 6

Kristin Cochrane, CEO of Penguin Random House Canada and this year's No. 13, with partner Tom Best

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GEORGE PIMENTEL PHOTOGRAPHY**

Sumith Fernando, whose deli, SumiLicious, was the only Scarborough restaurant to receive Michelin recognition, with partner Shalika De Fonseka

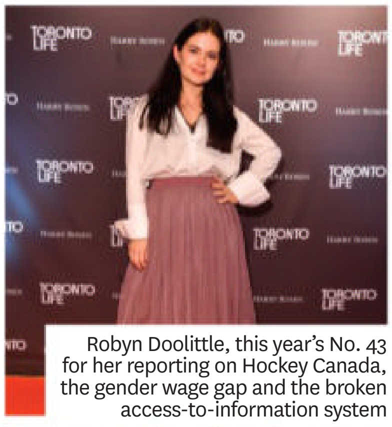
TikTok titan Patsy Collins (right) with a friend

Neil Hetherington, CEO of the Daily Bread Food Bank and No. 27

*Jeopardy!* champ Mattea Roach, No. 50, posing with the supersized likeness of No. 1, Simu Liu

Global News journalist Seán O'Shea, who ranked No. 40 on the list for his intrepid reporting from the trucker convoy protest at Parliament Hill

DJ Jon Daniels



Robyn Doolittle, this year's No. 43 for her reporting on Hockey Canada, the gender wage gap and the broken access-to-information system

Doug Downey (left), attorney general of Ontario (No. 24), with Amin Massoudi, informal adviser to Premier Doug Ford

*Toronto Life* editor-in-chief Malcolm Johnston congratulates this year's most influential

Ken Hunt, publisher of *Toronto Life* and president of SJC Media, flanked by Bernadette Morra (left), editor-in-chief of *FASHION*, and PR pro Michelle Levy

Ian Rosen (left), president and COO of Harry Rosen, with Larry Rosen, CEO and chairman

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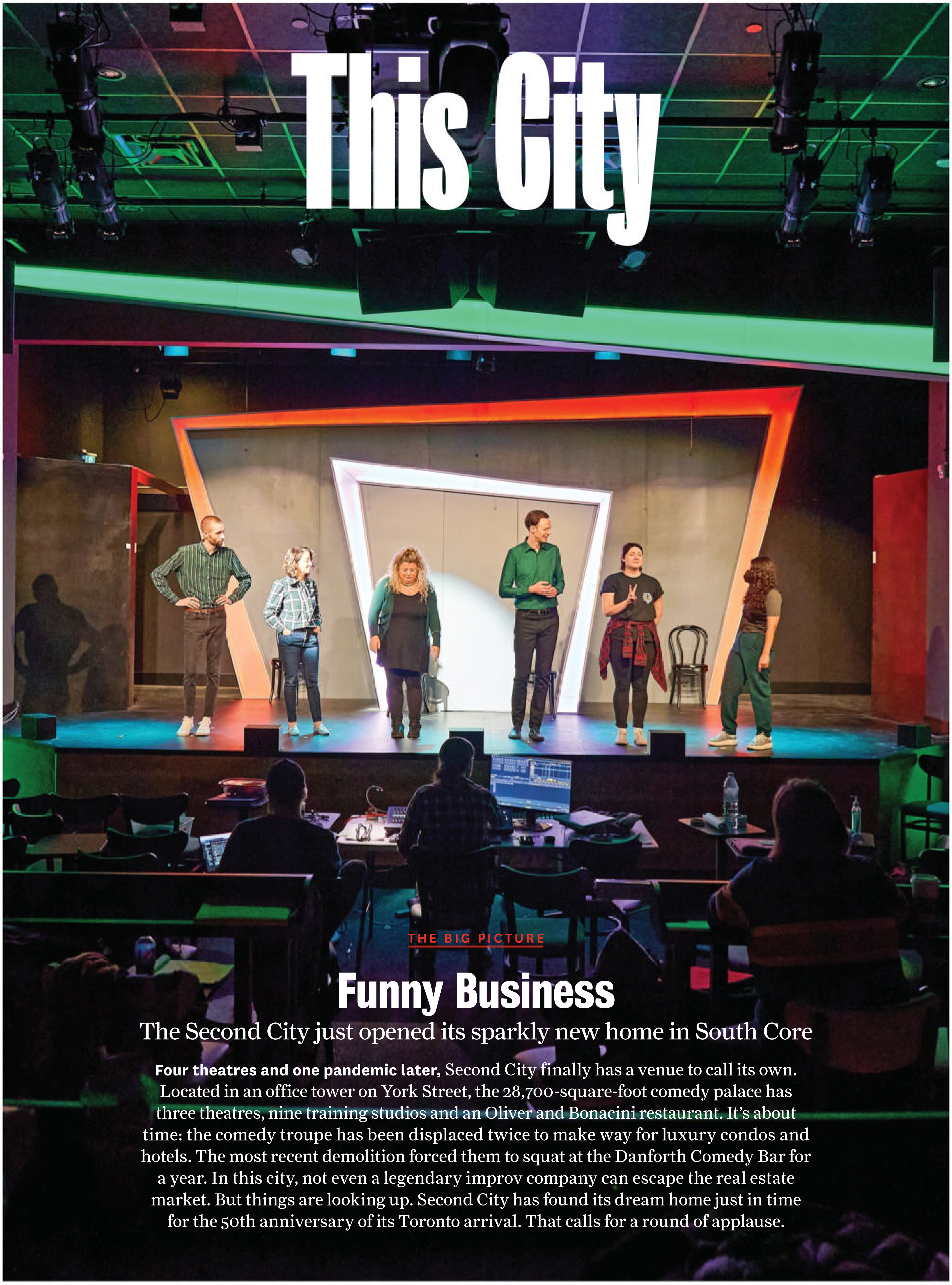
“King Street nightlife is fun. Then you turn 30 and just want to be in bed by 11” —*Andrew Phung,* P. 24

# This City



**THE BIG PICTURE**

## Funny Business

### The Second City just opened its sparkly new home in South Core

**Four theatres and one pandemic later,** Second City finally has a venue to call its own. Located in an office tower on York Street, the 28,700-square-foot comedy palace has three theatres, nine training studios and an Oliver and Bonacini restaurant. It’s about time: the comedy troupe has been displaced twice to make way for luxury condos and hotels. The most recent demolition forced them to squat at the Danforth Comedy Bar for a year. In this city, not even a legendary improv company can escape the real estate market. But things are looking up. Second City has found its dream home just in time for the 50th anniversary of its Toronto arrival. That calls for a round of applause.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PATRICK MARCOUX

# Q&A

## Dad Jokes

Andrew Phung was born funny. First, he crushed it as the lovable sidekick Kimchi in *Kim's Convenience*. Now, he's the dad everyone wishes they had in *Run the Burbs*

BY COURTNEY SHEA

**You've said your CBC sitcom, *Run the Burbs*, is a throwback to '90s series like *Full House*. How so?**
If *Full House* was about the Tanners, you could say *Run the Burbs* is about their neighbours—the people whose stories never got told. But our show is unique in other ways: a lot of family comedies are about bickering, whereas my show is about two adults who love their kids. It's funny that such a basic premise feels fresh.

**You play Andrew Pham, a Vietnamese Canadian with two kids and a distinct haircut. This is your real life, right?**
It's very much inspired by my life as a dad. I stayed home when my first child was born, and I loved it. Then he started school, and I had to figure out who I was again. Those experiences really informed Pham's character. Parenting today is not like when I was growing up.

**Please explain.**
It's more honest. When I was a kid, my mom caught me masturbating and told me my penis would fall off if I did it again. I want to be more positive about things like sex and to be more open in general. My son is now eight, and we talk about racism and bullying.

**Why did you base your show in the Toronto suburbs?**
The suburbs have always been portrayed as mundane, but they're full of energy. You have lots of young people moving out of downtown, especially since the pandemic. I was in Hamilton the other day and I met a Korean couple who had just opened a coffee shop. Sneaker shops are popping up there too. King Street nightlife is fun, but then you turn 30 and just want to be in bed by 11.

**How did you get discovered?**
I was working at a non-profit in Edmonton in my 20s when I joined a comedy troupe called the Loose Moose. Ins Choi, the creator of *Kim's Convenience*, saw my show and cast me as Kimchi.

**How did it feel when strangers started recognizing you?**
I loved it. First, people thought they had met me at a party or something. Then strangers would greet me as "Kimchi." In the past few months, people have started calling me "Andrew," my real name and my character's name. That's been pretty cool.

**New character, same haircut.**
If you watch *Kim's* closely, my hair volume grows in direct correlation to the success of the show. Today, I can go out in a mask and a hoodie and people still recognize me. It flies in the face of the longstanding criticism that there's no star system in Canada. And now look at my boy Simu Liu.

**Simu and some of your other co-stars called out racist storylines and a lack of diversity on *Kim's*. Thoughts?**
I support my co-stars. A lot of the fallout happened after *Run the Burbs* was green-lit, so I tried to focus on doing better. Our team is culturally diverse, with different world views. We also have cultural consultants who vet every script. It's the little details you want to get right, like the number of times to bow when paying respect to dead relatives. Bowing etiquette varies from ethnicity to ethnicity.

**A lot of us gather around the TV during the holidays. But, growing up, I never saw any Asian Christmas specials.**
Holiday episodes are such staples that most viewers don't even think of them as cultural, but they are. *Run the Burbs* is doing a Lunar New Year episode. But the holiday is really just a backdrop for the comedy and drama. Every family has the same laughs and squabbles.

**Any plans to join Simu in LA?**
Maybe I would have moved there five years ago. But, much like Pham, I'm a dad and I'm happy here with my family.

**Sadly, Toronto doesn't have quite the same sneaker scene. How many do you own, by the way?**
Maybe 400 or 500 pairs.

**Sorry, you have 500 pairs of sneakers?**
I grew up in the '90s! My favourites are my Steve Nash Air Maxes—they were my wife's first gift to me—and my Shattered Backboard Jordans, which I wore to my callback for *Kim's*. Those shoes changed my life.

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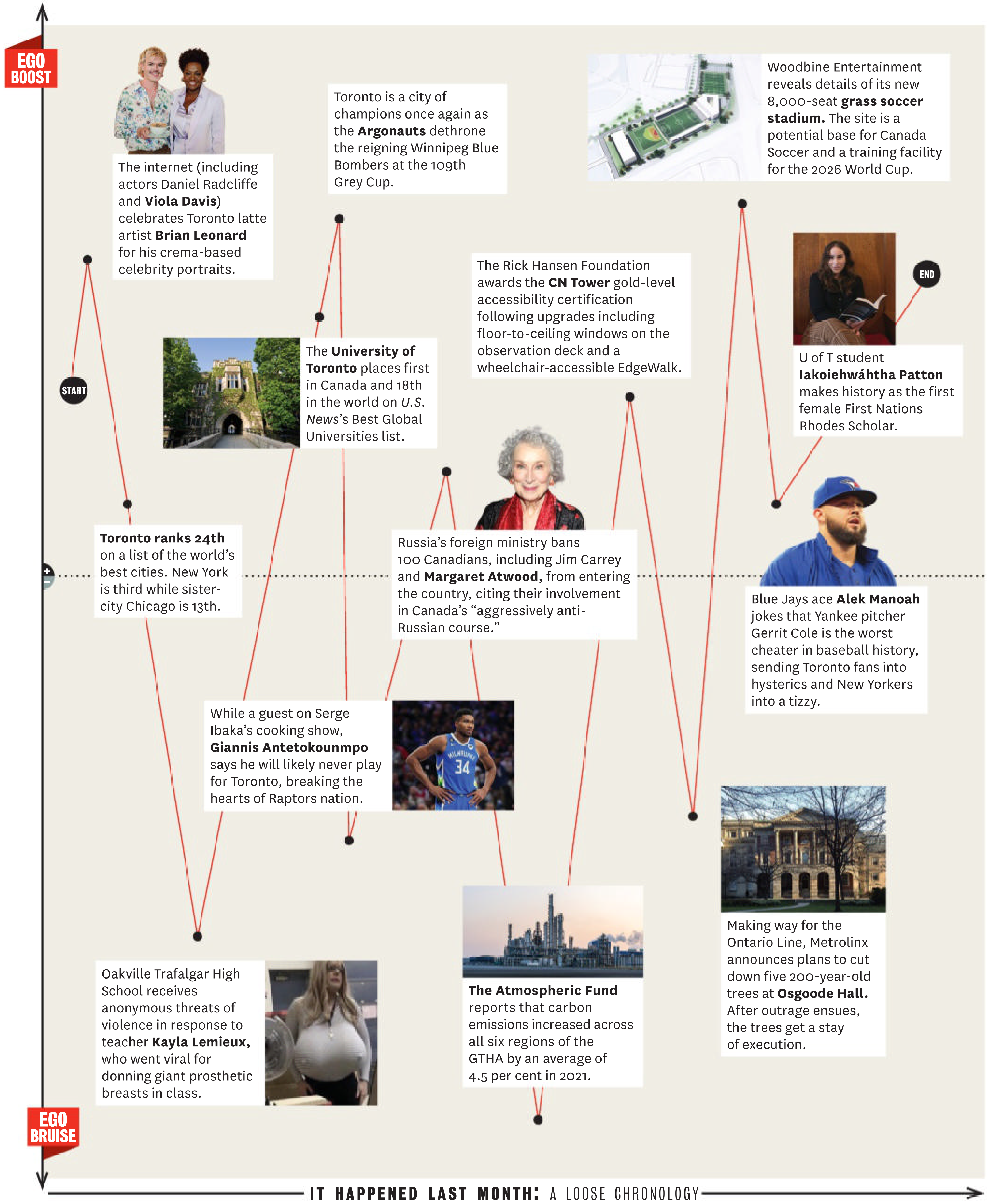
*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIN LEYDON

# Ego Meter

WHAT'S MAKING AND SHAKING THE CITY'S SELF-IMAGE



The internet (including actors Daniel Radcliffe and **Viola Davis**) celebrates Toronto latte artist **Brian Leonard** for his crema-based celebrity portraits.

**Toronto ranks 24th** on a list of the world's best cities. New York is third while sister-city Chicago is 13th.

Oakville Trafalgar High School receives anonymous threats of violence in response to teacher **Kayla Lemieux,** who went viral for donning giant prosthetic breasts in class.

The **University of Toronto** places first in Canada and 18th in the world on *U.S. News*'s Best Global Universities list.

Toronto is a city of champions once again as the **Argonauts** dethrone the reigning Winnipeg Blue Bombers at the 109th Grey Cup.

While a guest on Serge Ibaka's cooking show, **Giannis Antetokounmpo** says he will likely never play for Toronto, breaking the hearts of Raptors nation.

Russia's foreign ministry bans 100 Canadians, including Jim Carrey and **Margaret Atwood,** from entering the country, citing their involvement in Canada's "aggressively anti-Russian course."

**The Atmospheric Fund** reports that carbon emissions increased across all six regions of the GTHA by an average of 4.5 per cent in 2021.

The Rick Hansen Foundation awards the **CN Tower** gold-level accessibility certification following upgrades including floor-to-ceiling windows on the observation deck and a wheelchair-accessible EdgeWalk.

Making way for the Ontario Line, Metrolinx announces plans to cut down five 200-year-old trees at **Osgoode Hall.** After outrage ensues, the trees get a stay of execution.

Woodbine Entertainment reveals details of its new 8,000-seat **grass soccer stadium.** The site is a potential base for Canada Soccer and a training facility for the 2026 World Cup.

Blue Jays ace **Alek Manoah** jokes that Yankee pitcher Gerrit Cole is the worst cheater in baseball history, sending Toronto fans into hysterics and New Yorkers into a tizzy.

U of T student **Iakoiehwáhtha Patton** makes history as the first female First Nations Rhodes Scholar.

U OF T, ATWOOD, MANOAH, ANTETOKOUNMPO, EMISSIONS AND OSGOODE HALL BY GETTY IMAGES; LEONARD WITH DAVIS COURTESY OF @BARISTABRIAN VIA INSTAGRAM; STADIUM COURTESY OF WOODBINE ENTERTAINMENT; PATTON COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT; LEMIEUX COURTESY OF @NANCY_CROUSE VIA TWITTER

# Cost of Living

What Torontonians make and how they spend it

## “I had a rough financial patch in my 20s, so I’m trying to save”

### CHRISTINE WOLFL, 32

**WHAT SHE DOES**
Freelance copywriting and marketing

**WHAT SHE MAKES**
$115,000 to $150,000

**WHERE SHE LIVES**
A one-bedroom condo in Humber Bay Shores

### REGULAR EXPENSES

**RENT:** $2,050 a month. “My goal is to buy, but my current condo is great for now.”
**HAIR:** $450 every two months. “I’m not a natural blonde, so I need to maintain.”
**BOTOX:** $200 every three months. “A little poke here and there is a girl’s best friend.”
**PHONE:** $115 a month. “I’m stuck with Bell, and it’s a little pricier than I’d like.”
**GROCERIES:** $500 a month.
**SELF-CARE:** $200 a month. “H2 OM is a godsend for biocharging and acupuncture.”
**DEBT PAYMENTS:** $400 a month. “I went through a rough patch in my 20s. My dad rescued me, and now I owe him some cash, which is better than credit card debt.”
**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** $11.99 a month for Disney Plus. “Not going to lie, I bought it for *Dancing With the Stars*.”
**PET CARE AND SUPPLIES:** $300 a month for her cat, Rudy, and dogs, Poppy and Maverick.

### RECENT SPLURGES

**TRIP TO THAILAND:** $9,800. “My partner graduated from Sheridan in May, and I’d had a really strong few months at work, so I wanted to take her on a trip to celebrate.”
**PERFUME:** $138. “I recently splurged on a bottle of YSL Libre. It makes me feel sexy.”
**CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS:** $260. “This is the third time I’ve purchased an artificial tree. This year, it’s condo sized. I love it so much that I snagged a second.”

### LONG-TERM SAVINGS

**SAVINGS ACCOUNT:** $500 a month. “I could do better here.”

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIN LEYDON

# The Audit

AN APPRAISAL OF THE MONTH IN MONEY

## $23.15

Minimum hourly wage required to live comfortably in the GTA, according to the Ontario Living Wage Network. That amounts to an annual salary of roughly $45,000. The province's current hourly minimum wage is $15.50.

## $1,600,000

Fee paid by Hockey Canada to crisis management firm Navigator in the face of ongoing sexual assault investigations. Hockey Canada vice-president Pat McLaughlin says his organization used no public funds in the transaction.

## $2,000,000

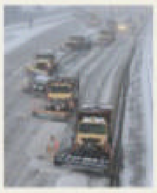
Salary of Deborah Flint, head of Pearson airport, in 2021—up $415,000 from the previous year. The raise makes Flint one of the highest-paid airport CEOs in North America.

## $20,000,000

Selling price of the 8,500-square-foot penthouse at Forma, a 73-storey luxury condo designed by Toronto native Frank Gehry and set to tower over King West by 2028.

## $109,000,000

Amount allocated in the city's operating budget to clearing and salting streets and sidewalks over the next seven years. The deal will cover the cost of keeping more than 1,500 contract workers on standby.



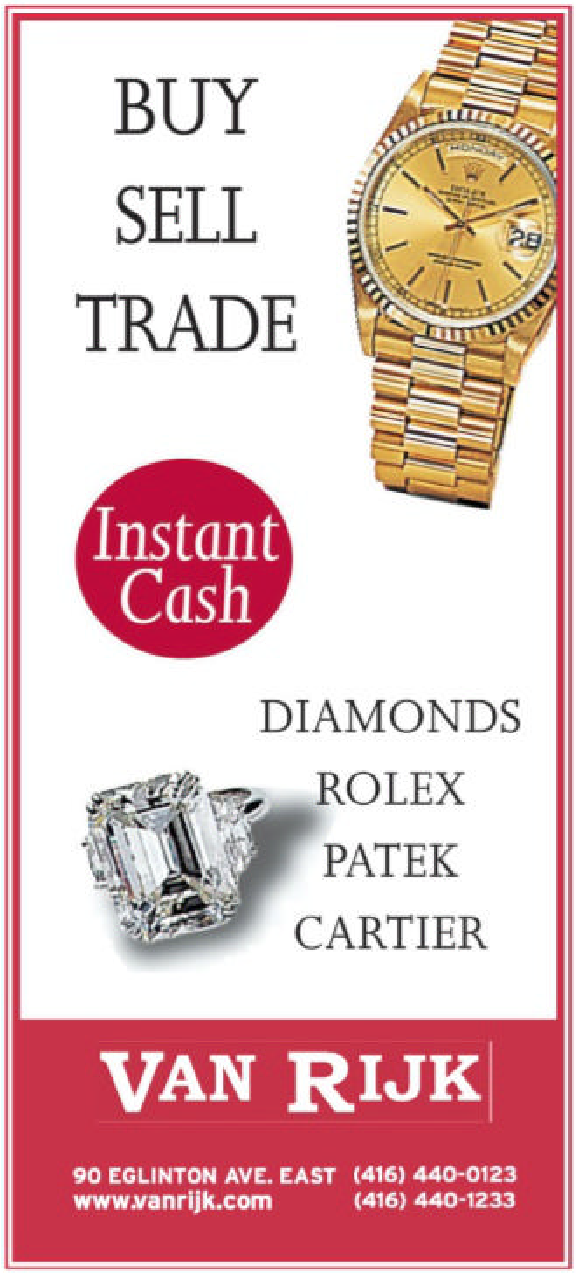
## $126,000,000

Funds invested by the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan into cryptocurrency exchange platform FTX, which imploded in November and is under investigation for alleged securities violations.

## $131,000,000,000

Amount Canadians have lost investing in publicly traded cannabis, according to Toronto-based law firm Miller Thomson. That figure works out to nearly $43,000 per investor.

FLINT, SNOWPLOWS AND FTX FOUNDER SAM BANKMAN-FRIED BY GETTY IMAGES; CONDO TOWERS COURTESY OF URBAN TORONTO



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# The Questionnaire

## REIGNING CHAMPS

Three GTA mayors discuss inflation, affordable housing and why they deserve to be back in power

### JOHN TORY

*Mayor of Toronto*

ROBERT REDFORD
"THE CANDIDATE"

**Celebrity doppelgänger:** "People say I look like Robert Redford, but I think it's because he was in *The Candidate*."

**Non-political mentor:** "My father. Until he passed away, in 2011, I always looked to him for advice."

**Dream job as a kid:** "I wanted to be a hockey player. I don't just say that because I'm the mayor. I'm a long-standing Leafs fan, and I used to idolize Tim Horton."

**Something every aspiring politician should know:** "Treat everyone with respect. Listen to everyone, no matter who they are, where they come from or what party they represent."

**The key to winning an election is…** "For people to like and trust you."

**Biggest issue facing Torontonians in 2023:** "Housing affordability."

**Your best and worst political attributes:** "My best is that I have a huge amount of respect and affection for every group across the city. My worst is that I give really long answers."

**Biggest regret:** "I've lost a couple of elections in my life. All you can do is dust yourself off and try to learn from it."

**Your thoughts on term limits:** "I think 12 years in a public office gives you enough time to get stuff done."

**When you retire from politics, you will…** "Contribute to the community, whether it's volunteering or something else."

### BONNIE CROMBIE

*Mayor of Mississauga*

**Celebrity doppelgänger:** "My friends say I look like Laura Dern."

**Non-political mentor:** "My grandmother Eva. If she'd had the same educational opportunities as me, she would have run large companies."

**Political idol:** "Hazel McCallion, bar none. She nurtured my political career."

**Coolest celebrity encounter:** "When *Seven Years in Tibet* premiered at TIFF, I met Brad Pitt in the green room."

**The key to winning an election is…** "Understanding what you want to accomplish and communicating that effectively to voters."

**Biggest issue facing Mississaugans in 2023:** "Food and housing affordability."

**Proudest political moment:** "In 2015, we received full funding for the Hurontario LRT. I'm still proud of that."

**Biggest regret:** "Not accomplishing Mexit, Mississauga's exit from Peel Region, during the first regional government review. Mississauga needs more tax dollars and decision-making powers at council."

**Your thoughts on term limits:** "A politician should have enough self-awareness to know when to hand the reins to someone with fresh ideas."

**If the city added $1 billion to the budget, you would…** "Build more affordable housing."

### PATRICK BROWN

*Mayor of Brampton*

**Celebrity doppelgänger:** "NBA legend Steve Nash, which is amusing because I'm only five foot eight."

**Secret to success:** "Hard work. My late grandfather Joe Tascona Sr. worked with a walker until he was 94."

**Non-political mentor:** "Mr. Fisher, my world religions teacher at St. Michael's College School. He pushed me to realize my academic potential."

**Political idol:** "Former Ontario premier Bill Davis. He radiated decency."

**The key to winning an election is…** "Again, hard work. Knock on doors, give speeches, get the word out."

**Biggest issue facing Bramptonians in 2023:** "Public safety. We're seeing a real increase in car thefts across the GTA."

Toronto Metropolitan University

**This term will be considered a success if…** "We complete the Osler hospital and build TMU's new medical school."

**Your best and worst political attributes:** "My best attribute is my work ethic. My worst is that I'm too trusting."

**Biggest regret:** "Stepping down as PC leader in 2018, under pressure from the caucus and party."

**Your thoughts on term limits:** "It depends. Sometimes multiple terms can lead to great contributions, like with Bill Davis and Hazel McCallion."

**What makes you qualified to handle billions in tax dollars?** "For every issue, I seek out and listen to experts."

TORY, BROWN AND MCCALLION BY CP IMAGES; DAVIS AND TMU BY GETTY IMAGES

# Urban Diplomat

Bridesmaid

Recently, I promised to host a wedding shower for one of my best friends. A week before the party, I caught Covid, but I was still up for hosting. The day of, after I had spent tons on fancy cheese and drinks, she told me over the phone that I sounded too sick to host. I ended up home alone, imagining all of my friends partying in some undisclosed location. It's been weeks, and quite honestly, I'm still seething. What should I do?

—**Cry If I Want To,** *Rathnelly*

**UD:** In the absence of a masking edict from Queen's Park, people are left to devise their own Covid policies. Even if you were honest about your illness well before the day of the event, it's not unreasonable for your friend to change her mind. No one wants to be responsible for a superspreader. If you're upset about missing out, remember: this is her moment, not yours. If you're upset about the money, there's a silver lining—you have enough cheese to see you through to spring.

**Dear Urban Diplomat,**
There's a mom in my neighbourhood who's itching to be my friend. I think she's estranged from her husband and lonely. While I sympathize, I'm not down for the role of void filler. The other day, she asked me to be her son's second emergency contact at school. (He has some health problems.) I feel bad saying no, but at the same time…*no!* How do I decline without seeming like a total jerk?

—**Right of Refusal,** *The Kingsway*

**UD:** Sometimes the blunt way is the right way. Tell her no, and then tell her why. Is your plate too full? Say so. Are you anxious about taking on the responsibility of someone else's child? Then tell her that instead. The truth may kill your relationship, but it should also exempt you from any guilt.

**Dear Urban Diplomat,**
A close friend of mine, a gorgeous, successful artist, has shacked up with a man 15 years her senior whom I find insufferable. They've been together for less than a year, and he now lives in her condo for free, won't allow her (a meat lover) to cook meat in her own kitchen and maintains that he doesn't believe in the traditional framework of a relationship. Somehow, my friend, who very much believes in monogamy, is smitten. I know I don't have to like the guy, but am I allowed to suggest that she's getting the fuzzy end of the lollipop?

—**Labour of Love,** *Bloorcourt Village*

**UD:** We can, indeed, choose our friends but not their mates. From the portrait you paint, your friend sounds rational and self-assured. She must be happy with his outlook on life even if it doesn't include meat-eating. Maybe, for whatever reason, she *wants* the fuzzy end of the lollipop. Or, more likely, she sees something in him that you don't. Keep an open mind, but also keep an eye on her to make sure she's okay. If you're genuinely worried that she's being exploited, telling her is the right thing to do—even if it doesn't do wonders for your friendship.

**Dear Urban Diplomat,**
My friend and I have had tickets to Dave Chappelle's show at Scotiabank Arena for ages. But, since his *SNL* monologue, wherein he joked about Jewish people—not to mention his prior comments about trans people—I'm no longer sure I should go. I really like Chappelle and don't think he's a bigot. But I understand why he can come off as such, and I'm not sure I'd enjoy being in a crowd that supports him for the wrong reasons. I also don't want to disappoint my buddy. Any advice?

—**Comedy Drama,** *Old Toronto*

**UD:** First, don't worry about disappointing your buddy. If he is a good friend, he will respect your choice. As for your ethics, the good news is that you have them—but grappling with moral quandaries is the price. Comedians like Chappelle walk a very fine line, and I too struggle to determine when they've crossed it. What I can suggest is to weigh out your feelings. If you're conflicted, err on the side of caution and don't go. If you regret it later, you can always catch his next Netflix special, at home, sans any rabble.

*Send your questions to the Urban Diplomat at urbandiplomat@torontolife.com*

ILLUSTRATION BY SALINI PERERA

# Wedding Registry Dos and Don’ts

Bride-to-be and Toronto-based content creator Anja Kandic of @voyageblog rounds up her most valuable registry tips and favourite items on her list

While wedding registries used to be primarily dedicated to homeware, they’ve now grown way beyond that. Couples are now able to fully personalize their marital wish lists—from decor and modern technology to unique activities and honeymoon funds. And all-in-one services like Amazon Wedding, with the world’s largest selection, have made the process even easier.

---

A weatherproof security camera that captures every detail of what goes on outside your home in 2K video, the **TP-Link Tapo C310 Outdoor Security Camera** is fully compatible with Amazon’s Alexa and Google Assistant.

The **Breville Juice Fountain Cold Plus Juicer** can hold 70 ounces and features dual speeds and a cold extraction system, and allows for shorter prep time thanks to its unique extra-wide chute that enables you to juice whole fruits and vegetables without precutting.

Calling all photography bugs! The **Panasonic DMCFZ300K LUMIX Digital Camera** captures moments in 4K imaging in both photo and video. It’s also splash-proof and dust-proof, and is designed with optical image stabilization for optimal steadiness.

The **Miele Triflex HX1 Bagless Stick Vacuum** is battery-powered, self-parks when in an upright position and is perfect for cleaning all areas. Plus, it has a 60-minute run-time, which is ideal for larger homes and spaces.

### DO include your partner

There’s a reason it’s called a WEdding. Don’t forget to get your partner involved when picking out your items. It’s essential to choose a collection of gifts that you’ll both enjoy and benefit from.

### DON’T overcomplicate it

A wedding registry is supposed to be fun and simple. Thankfully, services like Amazon Wedding have made it even more streamlined. All you have to do is click “Create Your Registry,” plug in your personal information and start adding your wish-list items to your list. It couldn’t be easier.

The nostalgic **Fujifilm Instax SQ1 Camera** allows you to capture and print photos instantly. It includes an auto-exposure feature, a selfie mirror and a rounded and textured grip for ease of use.

A high-performance and elegantly designed coffee machine, the **De’Longhi Dinamica Automatic Coffee & Espresso Machine** heats up in less than 40 seconds, has a breakthrough steel burr grinder to optimize the freshness of your coffee and can brew a full-bodied iced coffee by brewing at a lower temperature to minimize dilution.

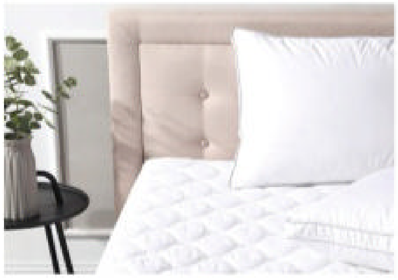
The **AeroGarden Harvest Elite Platinum** is a high-tech, easy-to-use indoor garden that is perfect for small homes and apartments with limited natural light. It allows you to plant up to six plants at a time, is designed with an LED high-efficiency grow lighting system to maximize photosynthesis and comes with an herb seed kit.

Breathable, absorbent and ideal to wear post-shower, sauna or swim, these matching terry-cloth **AW Bridal Couple's Towel Robes** are made from 100 per cent premium combed cotton.

Calling all honeymooners! The **AmazonBasics Travel Luggage Hardside Spinner Suitcase** is ideal for trips longer than a week. It's designed with a scratch-resistant finish and is made with extra-thick ABS for enhanced strength and durability.

### DO pick out pieces at different price points

It's important to pick out products at a wide range of prices to accommodate your diverse wedding guest list. Be sure to include a healthy number of options both in the higher range—kitchen appliances, furniture and barbecues—and the lower range, like decorative pillows, camping gear and glassware.



Made with silky, soft cotton, the **Classic Brands Quilted Waterproof Mattress Protector** has an extra quilted, padded top layer for ultimate comfort and is machine washable.

### DO start as early as possible

If there's one thing you can check off your wedding to-do list early on, it's setting up your registry. It not only gives you one less thing to worry about, but that extra lead time is beneficial if you're inspired to add or remove certain items down the line.

An elegant yet simple piece, the **Petite Boutique 16K Gold Personalized Bracelet** is made with 16 karat gold and is the perfect canvas for engraving your initials, a name, or a custom message. Hint: Outside of your registry, it's also a great gift for your bridesmaid squad.

With a 10.1 inch HD screen, the **Amazon Echo Show 10** is perfect for video calls, and can be used as a speaker, television, digital picture frame, recipe displayer and even a smart home device—allowing you to connect your lights, security cameras and thermostat. It's an all-in-one dream.

This premium **Wilson Golf Ultra Plus Package Set** has nine clubs in total. Each is designed for optimal performance and durability.

Perfect for date night, this easy-to-use **InnoMoon Pasta Roller Attachment for KitchenAid Stand Mixers** helps you whip out authentic fresh pasta quickly from home.

The **Simple&Opulence Linen Duvet Cover Set** includes one duvet cover and two pillow shams. It's made with 100 per cent pure linen and gets softer after each wash. Perfectly warm on chilly nights while cool and breathable during warm ones.

### DON'T limit yourself to a single category

Think outside the box. Don't limit yourself to pans, decor and cutlery. While those are important items to have as newlyweds, branch out and include other product categories as well. Consider home gadgets, workout gear, travel essentials and hobby-related products. These are the items that will turn your house into a home.

**Create your registry today at amazon.ca/wedding**

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# RENTING IN TORONTO IS A NIGHTMARE

SOARING PRICES

OUT-OF-CONTROL BIDDING WARS

SHRINKING SQUARE FOOTAGE

GREEDY LANDLORDS

## AND IT’S ONLY GETTING WORSE

## DISPATCHES FROM THE HOUSING CRISIS

By ALEX CYR,
RACHEL GANZ,
MADDY MAHONEY,
MATHEW SILVER
and ANDREA YU

# GIVE ME SHELTER

Portraits by
IAN BROWN

# TORONTO IS A CITY OF RENTERS.

Nearly half of all Torontonians lease their space, either by choice or, let's be real, necessity. In the past decade alone, the number of renter households in the GTA has jumped roughly 25 per cent. Renting is supposed to be cheaper, more attainable, less stressful—a way to build a home without having to actually buy one. So why is it such hell?

Rental prices dipped early in the pandemic, but they've since rebounded—and then some. By October 2022, the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom unit in Toronto was $2,481. A two-bedroom? $3,319. More renters also means more competition, and the city's vacancy rate is hovering around one per cent. In the fall, desperate would-be tenants entered into bidding wars for more than a third of GTA condo units, often stretching their already-stretched budgets. Meanwhile, square footage is steadily shrinking. We're paying astronomically more for increasingly less.

Add to this the many, *many* headaches of renting. Hassling the landlord to fix that defective stove or leaky sink. Discovering cockroaches in the kitchen cupboard. Loud neighbours who play club music at 2 a.m. Terrible roommates. Busted heating. Broken intercoms. It all happens, all the time, and as any renter can attest, it's all awful.

There's also every reason to believe that the situation will get bleaker. (Sorry.) About a quarter of renters are already spending more than half their income on housing; the recommended amount is 30 per cent. Even the median household income in Toronto—$85,000 after tax—isn't enough to cover the average one-bedroom. At least, not if a tenant plans to pay for groceries, transit or anything fun. More purpose-built rental buildings would help, but the city is laser-focused on condos—many of which have been delayed or cancelled because of skyrocketing construction costs and spiking interest rates.

One sliver of sunshine: home prices will continue to drop slightly this year, in theory allowing some renters to buy. Those vacancies should cool the red hot rental market a few degrees. But more is needed: more units, more rent control, more tenant protection. Without large-scale change, Toronto is destined to become a city only the super-rich can afford—and a place where few will want to live. In the pages ahead, an on-the-ground look at the maddening hunt for shelter.

> **"Apartment hunting was like a part-time job. We couldn't book a showing anywhere"**
>
> **STELLA LI, 24,**
> software engineer
> **CIARA CHUTE, 23,**
> assistant controller at
> a recruiting company

**STELLA AND I MET IN 2020.** We clicked immediately and kept dating when she left Toronto to finish her master's degree at the University of Southern California. I stayed to complete my postgraduate program at U of T. We made it work, but we both looked forward to Stella moving back to Ontario—and to moving in together.

Last spring, we finally started looking for our first place. Every other time I've rented in the city, it's taken me about a week to find a place. I didn't expect it to be any different this time around. I was very wrong. It was a nightmare.

We wanted an apartment downtown, with easy subway access. Stella worked remotely, and I would need to commute to Yonge and Eglinton. Ideally, we'd get a two-bedroom and use the second room as an office. We also wanted an in-suite washer and dryer, plus at least one parking spot. Other amenities, like a pool and gym, would be a bonus. Our budget was roughly $2,600.

Initially, we looked at Church and Wellesley, Cabbagetown, and the Financial District, but we realized that we could only get a small one-bedroom within our budget. Most places were roughly 500 square feet. None of them had a washer and dryer, and parking downtown would've been impossible.

By July, it became clear that if we wanted a two-bedroom, we'd need to look uptown, near Yonge and Eglinton. But we couldn't get a showing anywhere. I spent hours scouring online listings. Looking for a place was like a part-time job. Every time we found a spot that ticked enough of our boxes, it was too late. The place would be on the market in the morning and gone by the evening. Usually, the landlords didn't even return our voicemails asking to see the apartment.

I had never considered using an agent before. As a renter for the past five years, I've always been able to find places by myself, just looking online and touring them. But the market was so tight, so fast-paced, that I thought, *This isn't working for us. Let's outsource and see what we can find.*

So, that month, we connected with a real estate agent named Susan Wen. If she found us something, she'd take a commission from the landlord based on the first month's rent. Early on, she found us a two-bedroom townhouse on Redpath Avenue. We loved it. Our favourite feature was the private rooftop deck.

On the downside, it was beyond our budget, listed for $2,900. And that didn't include utilities. We decided to go for it anyway. We put in a bid for the listed price, but there were at least five other offers on the table. The landlord asked if we wanted to up our bid, but we couldn't stretch our budget any further. It ultimately went for $3,100 a month, utilities still not included.

We visited 10 more places and bid on three of them. We got blown out of the water each time. It felt like we might never find a rental in this crazy market—even after we lowered our expectations and broadened our search to a one-bedroom.

Eventually, Susan found us a one-bedroom plus den a few blocks from Yonge and Eglinton, listed for $2,650. It had all of the amenities we were looking for: washer and dryer, parking, a gym, and a pool. It also had a balcony. We figured we could convert the den into a home office.

We went for it, putting in a bid at the asking price that afternoon. We were lucky: there was only one other bidder at the table. Plus, we had good credit. When we learned we had won the place, we were ecstatic. We got the keys on September 1.

The area is a perfect mix of city life and calmness, with plenty of shops and restaurants. And we're close enough to the subway that we have easy access to downtown. After a couple of years of long distance and a hectic rental search, we finally have our first home together.

# “I keep my belongings in a storage unit and move from sublet to sublet”

**EVA FOOTE, 26,**
actor and musician

I MOVED TO TORONTO four years ago, after graduating from the National Theatre School of Canada, in Montreal. I was keen to build my career as an actor, and everyone—from my professors to my new agent—encouraged me to move to Toronto.

I found a part-time job as a server for $12 an hour. On a good night, I could earn $100 in tips. It allowed me time to audition, but it also meant my rent budget was only $800, not nearly enough to get my own place. To find a spot, I posted on Facebook asking for leads. A former co-worker’s friend needed to sublet their one-bedroom apartment at Yonge and College—but only for a month. Rent was $1,475, way over my budget, but he hadn’t found anybody yet and was desperate. He let me have it for $650.

The unit was huge, painted electric orange and decorated with personal photos. It was hard not to feel like a guest, sleeping in his bed and using all his kitchenware. I kept my clothes in my suitcase, and on many nights I invited friends to keep me company. Still, I was grateful I’d found a spot—and incredibly thankful for my community of fellow actors, who had generously helped me find a place (and would continue to do so again and again).

I had to hustle to line up another sublet for when my month was up. A week into my stay, I was already on the hunt for my next home. Luckily, one of my friends was subletting her room for $700. The apartment was located in Kensington Market, above a restaurant, and she shared it with two people I didn’t know. I took it for two months.

Her room was cluttered, but I loved the bustling sounds of the market—a notable departure from my previous downtown sublet. Though the place had charm, being a short-term renter in a shared apartment came with some challenges. At one point, I watched a rat crawl into the stove. I told the other tenants about it, but because I was only a subletter, I knew there wasn’t much I could do.

From there, I rented a small room for $850 in a west-end townhouse that a friend had left vacant while she was on tour. Then, in September 2019, I was hired as a performer by the

Stratford Festival Conservatory, and I moved into a place near the theatre. The gig lasted until March 2020. I weathered the first few months of the pandemic at my parents' house, in Burnaby, then sublet a room in a friend's house in Edmonton before deciding to try Toronto again in September 2021.

While I was investigating rental options, I was hired back at Stratford, where I lived and worked until October. Next, I was hired to appear in the Toronto stage production of *Fall on Your Knees*, but it didn't start until late November. With nowhere to crash in the interim, I decided to travel to Berlin, where I was able to stay in my sister's apartment. It was wonderful. Subletting is often challenging and isolating, but it can also be exciting. There's a sense of adventure that comes with being untethered to a lease.

Since graduating, I've lived in nine cities and 15 sublets. I spend a lot of time searching for places to live and calculating the hours of work necessary to afford the cheapest accommodations possible. I keep my belongings in my car and a storage unit. Sometimes I crave consistency and dream of owning a potted plant. Other times I'm glad I get to experience so many new places. There's enormous privilege in being this mobile. At the end of the day, I keep moving.

REZNIK COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT

## The Busy Agent

*Realtor **Paula Reznik** co-founded her own brokerage, Brewing Brokers, in February 2022. These days, she spends half of her working hours helping clients find rentals*

**You do business with buyers and renters downtown. What trends are you seeing in Toronto's rental market?**
I feel like I've seen it all in the past four years. In 2020, the market was very slow. Then, between May and October of 2022, I'd receive messages from three potential rental clients per week. During the hottest time, rentals would go on and off the market within a single day.

**And what about now?**
Home prices have stabilized enough to convert some renters into buyers. But I'm still busy. I've put in offers a few times only to lose to another renter with the same job and identical credit history. You can have a pristine resumé and still be beat out.

**Is competition between tenants the biggest challenge you face when working with renters?**
It's that and price. These days, the minimum rent downtown is more than $2,200 for a one-bedroom. People who don't have that in their budgets are stuck shopping for studios, and not everyone wants to live in a 300-square-foot unit.

**What's the worst place you've seen go for the most money?**
In June, I showed a unit that reeked of animals—I think dogs—and all the floors were scratched. Somehow, it got three offers in 24 hours and leased for $3,000, which was $100 over asking.

**That's wild.**
Even standard one-bedroom box rentals can attract multiple offers. In July, I had a client, a lawyer with good credit, who wanted to rent a 1+1 downtown. We bid $3,000, a few hundred over asking, and someone else bid even higher. We gave up because it was getting ridiculous.

**Where do we go from here?**
We might see more buyers, and that could cool the market. But the downtown prices we're seeing probably won't go down by much anytime soon.

**IN DECEMBER OF 2021,** I moved from a basement studio near Casa Loma to a one-bedroom apartment near St. Lawrence Market. The rent was $1,800 a month, but it checked all my boxes: it was all mine, had plenty of sunlight and was a 15-minute walk from work.

I settled in over the next few months and was ready to stay a second year. But, one day, shortly after buying a new patio couch for my balcony, I received an email informing me that my monthly rent would increase by $450 starting December 1.

My jaw dropped. Staying there would mean paying my landlord roughly $6,000 more than I did in year one—that's an absurd jump for one tenant to cover. I figured it couldn't be legal.

I figured wrong. It turns out that, in late 2018, the Ford government eliminated rent control for any unit that was either built or occupied for the first time from that point on. If my building had been protected by rent control, my increase would have been limited to 1.2 per cent, or roughly $20 a month—something I could have afforded.

I started planning my move. It wasn't even really the money that made me want to leave—I could have stretched my income and paid $2,250 per month if I had to. It was the idea of staying with a landlord who feels comfortable doing something like that. Besides, I don't think anybody should spend more than $2,000 a month for a place that's less than 500 square feet.

I started looking around, but this was September, and people weren't yet listing places for December. I had to wait a month, and I felt like a sitting duck. It was so stressful.

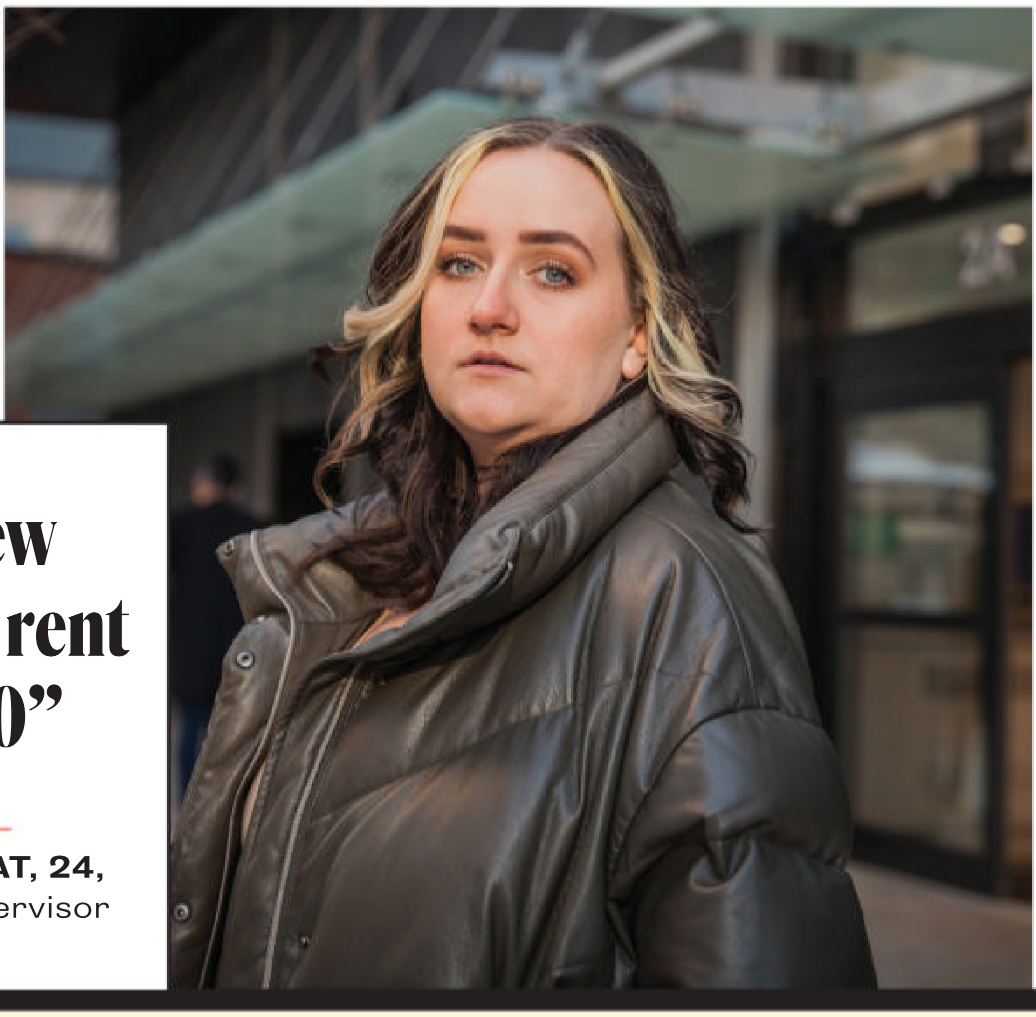
Most places I liked cost more than $2,000. At one point, I went to see a newly renovated basement apartment by Lansdowne station. During my visit, I asked the agent if it was rent-controlled. They said no, and I walked right out.

I thought about buying a condo instead, but I calculated that my mortgage payments would be around $4,000—even for a studio. I had to continue renting.

The longer I looked for a rent-controlled unit, the more I worried that I would have to pay far more than I had ever envisioned. I'd lose any ability to put money into savings.

Luckily, I eventually found a one-bedroom apartment in Roncesvalles Village for $1,850 a month plus utilities. It's larger than my old place and rent-controlled, and it even has a sunroom where I can put my new patio furniture.

The last two months in my old apartment were brutal. It stopped feeling like home the moment I got notice of the huge rent hike. Looking back, I'm frustrated that I didn't know my rent could suddenly increase that much. Other renters need to know that it could happen to them too.

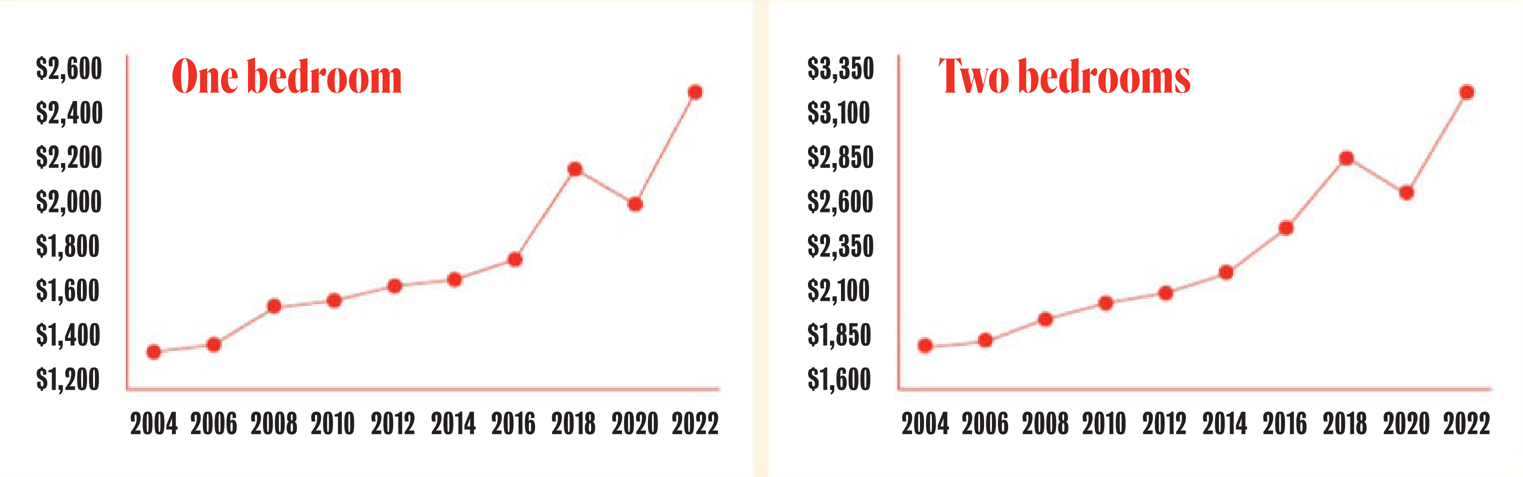


## "I loved my new place—until my rent went up $450"

**SYDNEY ADDISON-RUDAT, 24,**
restaurant server and supervisor

## Pay Up

Condo units are increasingly popular with renters—and increasingly pricey



# "When I fought back against the developers, they tried to evict me"

**TERRY DEMERSON, 48,**
web developer, dance instructor and performer

**IN 2004,** I moved into a 1,300-square-foot loft in Liberty Village. My building is one of the three historic low-rises on the property. The unit itself is gorgeous, with wood beams and exposed brick walls, and the rent was relatively cheap when I moved in—less than $1,400. Because the apartment has a live-work designation, which allows people like me to live in the same space where I operate my business, I spend a lot of time there.

It was great. But, in 2014, the complex was sold. The new owners planned to renovate my building and demolish the others to make room for a glossy new co-working space. In November, they sent out a notice informing me and my fellow tenants that we had to be out by March 2015. I've been fighting to keep my home ever since.

Under the Residential Tenancies Act, tenants are entitled to compensation—either the equivalent of three months' rent or another apartment—if their units are turned into commercial space. However, when the developer submitted their renovation application to the city, they listed the building's current use as commercial—meaning that residential protections wouldn't apply.

Eighteen of my neighbours panicked and moved out. But I decided to fight back. I took my case to the Landlord and Tenant Board, arguing that my unit should be designated as a residential live-work space, not a commercial one. And I won, which set a precedent: existing tenants had the right to stay, and those who had left were entitled to compensation.

But the battle wasn't over yet. The developer attempted to move forward while following the city's housing by-laws by amending their proposal to include new off-site live-work units for existing tenants. The city stipulates that such replacement units must be "like-for-like"—meaning of a similar type and size, for a similar rent. Developers must keep up existing service and maintenance, and they can't harass us.

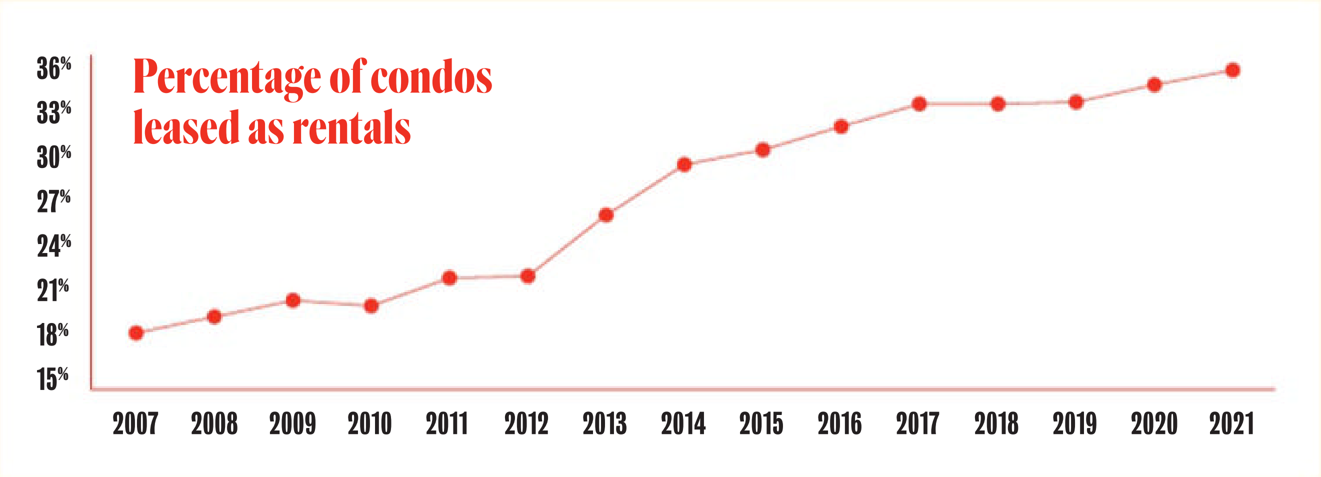
To make sure that all happens, I helped found a tenants' association and became its president. I spent thousands of hours filing complaints and dealing with building notices. That's a significant amount of time for anybody, but especially for a freelancer who is paid by the hour like me.

In 2020, the complex was sold to another developer that planned to continue the redevelopment. They recently filed an eviction notice against me for accessing the roof deck, which we'd all been using since before 2014. I've been in limbo for eight years now, worrying when I'll lose my home and workspace. The battle has taken its toll. At this point, I know I'll have to move out during the renovation, but I want to be treated decently.

Ideally, the developer and the city will make it possible for me to move elsewhere in Liberty Village with a similar layout and monthly rent. Then, after the renovation, I can come back to the building and get a similar unit for a similar price. Would I take a buyout instead? Maybe, but I've never been offered one—and I doubt it could replace what I'm losing.

## The Rise of Rentals

A condo is now twice as likely to be rented as it was in 2007



## The Rental Crusader

***Abigail Bond** is the executive director of Toronto's Housing Secretariat. She's on a mission to reinstate rent control and make renovictions a thing of the past*

**It's a frustrating, infuriating, terrifying time to be a renter in Toronto. Agreed?**
We have a volatile rental market. People are being priced out of renting, and the inventory remains low. Ending vacancy decontrol, the policy that allows landlords to raise rent as much as they want between tenants, would be one way to help—and would play a part in deterring renovictions.

**That's a big ship to turn. Can the city do anything to help renters in the meantime?**
The city doesn't have great data on the frequency and magnitude of renovictions, but we know that they are ubiquitous. Many renters have shared stories with us, but we can't rely only on anecdotes.

**Sure, but renters are desperate. Has there been any attempt to collect that data?**
Yes, that's happening now. Plus, we recently pushed city council to reinstate a bylaw designed to stop renovictions. Under it, landlords would need to tell the city about any planned renovation. It's modelled after BC's Residential Tenancy Act, which requires landlords to apply for renovation permission. If our bylaw gets a green light, tenants will have four months to vacate and will receive the equivalent of one month's rent.

**Critics, including landlords, would say that stripping them of the power to price their units at market rates will discourage investment in rental stock. Is it worth the risk?**
Growth in rental supply is important. But we also need to focus on protecting the city's existing renters and not compromising their housing for the benefit of future residents. We cannot choose just one priority: we need to do both.

**So we need to protect current renters in order for Toronto to remain a city people actually want to live in?**
Absolutely. Otherwise, some people will leave the city altogether. We don't want that. Our city relies on many people to run well—from grocery store workers to teachers to taxi drivers. And they deserve good, affordable spaces.

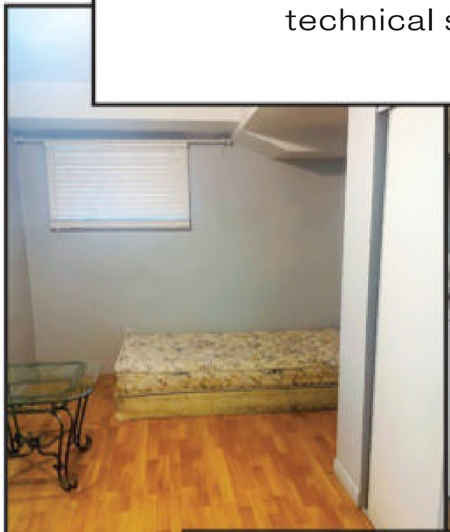
**IN 2019,** I moved from Delhi, India, to study computer systems and networking at Canadore College in Mississauga. For the first year, I lived at my uncle's house in Brampton. In February 2020, my childhood friend from India also moved to Canada. We decided to rent a one-bedroom basement apartment together near Square One. I was in the bedroom; it was small and had no closet. My friend set up in the den.

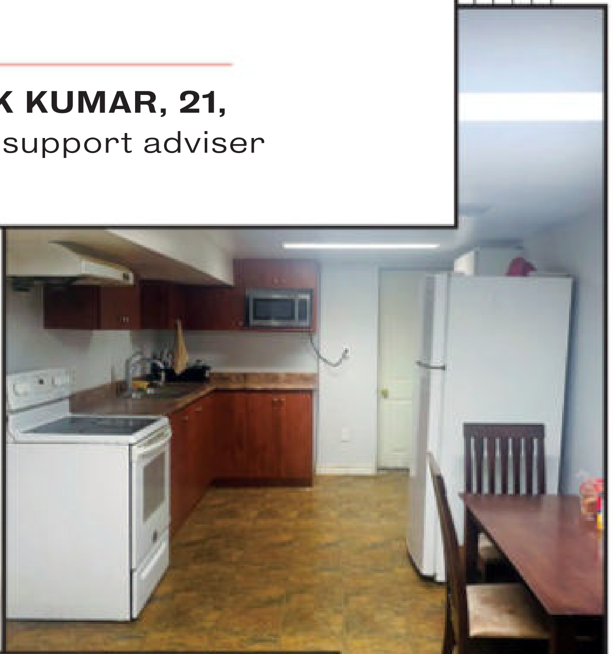
We paid $800 a month total, evenly split, utilities included. The landlord was so nice. Whenever anything broke or a light bulb went out, they replaced it quickly. If we ever felt too hot in the summer or too cold in the winter, we'd just text and she'd adjust the temperature until we were comfortable.

In April 2021, my older sister, Sarita, moved here to study supply chain management at Niagara College's Toronto campus. My friend had just bought a car, and our current rental didn't have any parking. We decided that he would find another place and Sarita and I would get a new apartment together.

I found a two-bedroom basement apartment on Facebook Marketplace that was just a kilometre away from our current place. It was small, but it would work for us. The rent was higher—$1,500,

> “My place was sweltering. I couldn't sleep. Then I discovered the bugs”
>
> **ASHOK KUMAR, 21,**
> technical support adviser





PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE SUBJECTS

utilities included—but we'd each have our own bedroom. We moved in on May 1, 2021. Our landlords were a couple who lived upstairs.

The problems started about a month after we moved in. I was home alone working in my bedroom when I heard someone in my apartment. There were two people in my kitchen—one of the landlords and a repairman. The landlord told me they were there to fix something in the furnace room. I found the intrusion pretty strange—it's illegal for a landlord to enter a tenant's unit without 24 hours' notice—but I didn't want to make a fuss.

Another time, I came home and there was a letter from my bank on the kitchen table. My landlords had brought it in. I told them I appreciated it but requested that they slide the letter under the door next time or just leave it in the mailbox. It made me uncomfortable knowing that they had entered my apartment when I wasn't there.

Things got really bad once the weather turned warm. Throughout the summer, our apartment was sweltering. We were sweating all the time. I purchased an indoor thermometer to see just how hot it was—and was shocked when it read 30 degrees. We couldn't sleep. I would text my landlords and ask them to turn on the air conditioning at night. At first, they would. But then they'd turn it off and I'd have to text again. This went on for weeks. Eventually, I didn't want to keep disturbing them, so I bought fans—one for me and one for Sarita—but they didn't help much.

Some nights, it was so hot that I couldn't fall asleep until 2 or 3 a.m. When it got really bad, Sarita would go to my uncle's house to sleep, and I'd go over to a friend's place. Eventually, we bought a $400 portable air conditioner from Best Buy. We couldn't afford to get two, so Sarita and I shared it between our bedrooms.

Around October, our apartment cooled down, but we soon discovered another problem: bugs. I had lived in a basement before, so I knew it was normal to sometimes see creepy-crawlies. But this was beyond normal. We had centipedes, spiders, beetles and some bugs I couldn't even identify. They were everywhere—in our living room, kitchen, bathroom, even in our bedrooms and on our beds. Trying to fall asleep, I would worry about what might be crawling around me.

We noticed that the bugs were getting into the apartment through a small gap between the floor and the walls. There were no baseboards anywhere in the unit. I gathered photo evidence of all the bugs and texted my landlords. At first they tried to blame us. They said we had bugs because the kitchen was dirty. But that wasn't true: we kept it clean. Eventually, they agreed to install baseboards throughout the apartment, but they only ever did so in the living room. I gave up and bought duct tape to seal up our bedrooms and caulking for the gaps in the washroom. It worked, and we saw fewer bugs.

In August 2022, our landlords texted to inform me that they were raising our rent from $1,500 to $1,900—an increase of 21 per cent. It didn't seem right. As far as I knew, our unit fell under the rent-control rules. They could increase our rent only by a maximum of 1.2 per cent that year—or about $18. I took a screenshot of the guidelines and sent it to my landlords. If we didn't like it, they told us, we could move out.

We negotiated and agreed to pay $1,800. But we couldn't afford the new price for long. Luckily, our uncle in Brampton had bought a new house and was renting out his old place. In December, we moved into the two-bedroom basement unit of his old home, paying $1,650 a month and splitting utilities with the tenants on the main and upper floors.

I'm trying to save up enough money to buy my own place, hopefully within a year. I don't want to deal with any more landlords—and I deserve a good night's rest after a hard day's work.

## Horror Stories

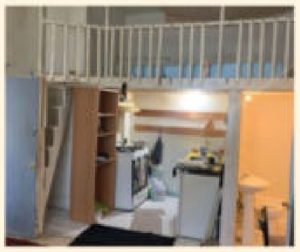
Five recent listings that seriously challenge the idea of a good deal

### Craptastic

**PRICE:** $1,200
**NEIGHBOURHOOD:** Scarborough
**LISTING:** This one-bedroom basement apartment advertises itself as "perfect for someone who doesn't cook much"—which is because there's no kitchen. The bedroom is big, but the bathroom is gross and lacks a door.

### Hall Pass

**PRICE:** $500
**NEIGHBOURHOOD:** Eglinton West
**LISTING:** At least the listing is honest: "You will be living in the hall." Rent includes a single mattress on the floor with a dividing curtain for privacy. The space is shared with three other tenants. Parking is extra.

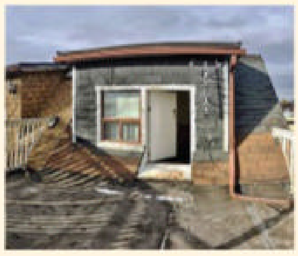


### Don't Look Up

**PRICE:** $885
**NEIGHBOURHOOD:** Christie Pits
**LISTING:** This loft raises some serious questions about structural integrity. The bedroom, accessed by a steep set of stairs, has about three-quarters of a railing and appears to be partially supported by a bookshelf.

### Bargain Basement

**PRICE:** $1,095
**NEIGHBOURHOOD:** The Annex
**LISTING:** This 250-square-foot basement studio is strictly rented to students. The listing focuses on the "unbeatable rate" and a sparse design that will "minimize distractions." Rent includes a bed, a mini fridge and a microwave.



### Room With a View

**PRICE:** $850
**NEIGHBOURHOOD:** Dufferin Grove
**LISTING:** This third-floor room comes furnished with a single bed, table and fold-up lawn chair. Tenants also have access to a sinking balcony for "summer enjoyment."

## “There were 22 bids on our dream unit. We won”

**JESSICA HYNES, 24,**
sales and customer service associate
**CHRIS KIRKHAM, 24,**
associate at a pottery supplies company

**IN EARLY 2021,** my boyfriend, Chris, and I moved into a two-bedroom basement apartment in Goulds, a neighbourhood in St. John’s, Newfoundland. The rent: $800 a month. The landlord was a family friend, so the renting process was pretty smooth. We saw the place and moved in within a week. At the time, I was studying psychology at Memorial University and Chris was working for Safety First, a traffic control company.

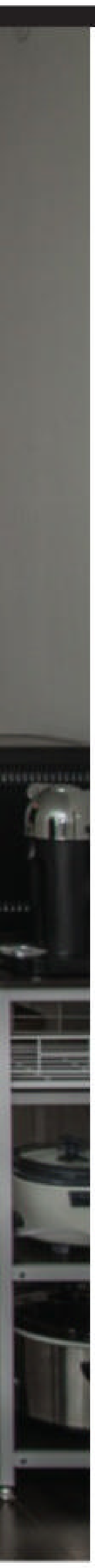
But we’d always planned to move to Toronto. We both wanted to try living in a big city. Plus, there were more job opportunities. So, last April, we packed up our stuff and our cat, Peaches, and drove to Ontario. Originally, we stayed with Chris’s dad and stepmom in Aurora. We were going to crash there until we could find a place of our own, which we expected to take a few weeks.

We really wanted a two-bedroom or a one-bed plus den, which would give us room to work from home. Our budget was roughly $2,000 a month. Early on, Chris got a job in Richmond Hill, so we focused our search at the north end of the city. I found a job shortly afterward.

The rental process in Toronto was agonizing. When I wasn’t working, I spent most of my time combing through listings. A lot of the places we liked didn’t allow pets. Whenever we saw something that looked good, I’d reach out right away—every time, the spot had already been rented.

One month passed like this, then another and another. I started to think we’d never find a place. We couldn’t even book a viewing! I was grateful that Chris’s dad had taken us in, but I didn’t want to stay there forever. I worried that we were encroaching on his space.

In Newfoundland, the process is so simple: if you see a listing you like, you go



see the place. In Goulds, we didn't even sign a lease. But we were totally striking out in Toronto. We needed help. So, in June, we decided to hire a real estate agent. Pretty quickly, she got us a viewing at a one-bed-plus-den, two-bath condo near Sheppard and the 404, listed for $2,200.

Because of our work schedules, our agent had to go see it for us. By the time she arrived, there were already 15 offers on the table. She sent us a two-minute walk-through video. At first, we didn't want to place a bid. Most of the other offers were above asking, and it seemed like a done deal.

Our agent encouraged us to try anyway. She suggested we write a one-page letter introducing ourselves and Peaches. After that, we crossed our fingers and went in at $2,350, just a bit above asking. We still hadn't seen the place in person, but we were tired of spending hours every day looking at online listings.

The landlords narrowed it down to two candidates, including us. They asked to meet us over Zoom. We were nervous. Chris changed his shirt several times before the call. It felt like our one shot to finally get a place, and we wanted to make a good impression.

During the call, the landlords asked us about ourselves and our finances. They knew the stereotype that everyone from Newfoundland is nice and hard-working, which I think worked in our favour. Plus, we're really quiet. When I'm not working, I like to read and bake. Chris likes playing video games and watching sports.

All told, there were 22 bids. Some were several hundred dollars above the listed rent. But, somehow, we got the place. We were both shocked and thrilled. We phoned our families in Newfoundland and told them the good news.

We moved in on July 1. The first thing we did was order Chinese food, open a bottle of wine and have a picnic on the floor. The place is perfect for us. It's about 700 square feet with a big balcony. We even have a dishwasher. Plus, we're right across from Fairview Mall, and there's a FreshCo within walking distance.

My favourite part is the two full bathrooms, because I no longer need to share with Chris. I use the den as a home office, and we have space for an air mattress for guests; my mom, her boyfriend and my brother recently visited from Newfoundland and stayed with us. The renting process was stressful and competitive—we've never experienced anything like it. But it all worked out in the end.

# Is That Even Legal?

Not every landlord follows the rules, and not every tenant knows them. Readers ask, we answer

**I live in a basement rental in a small house in Parkdale. Last week, my landlord told me that he intended to sell and that, by law, I needed to be gone by the end of the month. He offered to pay me $1,000, which is nice, but the whole thing seems to be progressing a bit quickly. I'm panicking. Do I really have to leave?**

It sounds like your landlord is trying to pull a fast one—probably because he believes that getting rid of you will make his house a more attractive sell. But he can't boot you for that reason. You're entitled to stay, and your lease would transfer to the buyer, who would become your new landlord. After that, your lease continues normally. One caveat: either landlord may try to hit you with an N12, which allows them, their immediate family or their caregiver to move into the unit. In that case, your landlord must offer compensation in the form of one month's rent (which is probably more than $1,000) or provide you with another rental unit that you deem reasonable.

**In early 2022, I moved from Winnipeg to Toronto for work. I found a nice one-bedroom downtown listed for $1,800 a month. I signed a one-year lease and moved in, feeling like I'd won the lottery. Well, the lease just expired, and my landlord is pressuring me to sign on for another year at $2,300 a month. He says if I don't sign it, I'll have to vacate. I don't know the rental rules in Ontario. Did my luck finally run out or is this landlord trying to take advantage of me?**

There are a whole whack of problems here. First, when a one-year lease expires, it automatically converts to a monthly, weekly or daily tenancy, whichever pay period you agreed to during the initial contract. So no need to sign another one-year lease—or anything at all, for that matter. Second, you don't need to move out (unless you're handed a legit N12). Third, the landlord can only increase your rent one year after you started renting or one year after your last increase, and not by more than the limit set by the Landlord and Tenant Board that year. In 2023, the maximum increase is 2.5 per cent, which would only bump your rent up to $1,845. One exception: buildings first occupied as residences after late 2018 are exempt from rent control. Figure out when yours was built and kindly send your landlord a copy of the LTB handbook.

**My boyfriend and I are in the middle of signing the lease for a two-bedroom apartment on Queen East. On the last page of the contract, in the finest of print, we noticed an additional $300 key deposit—on top of the rent deposit. We asked the landlord to remove it from the contract, but he said it's standard in all of his lease agreements. Is this actually a thing?**

Kudos for reading the fine print, but unfortunately, you need to pony up. Per the LTB, your landlord can charge a key deposit. That said, it must be refundable and roughly equivalent to the cost of replacing the key, which can range from $5 to $400 depending on whether it's a regular old metal key or a newfangled fob. So, before you sign anything, ask your landlord what type of key it is and do some research about the cost of replacement. Then update the fine print accordingly.

SIGMUND FREUD
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94

*Musk inside a Queen's University dorm room, wearing the school's signature leather jacket*

# THE EDUCATION OF ELON MUSK

BEFORE HE WAS THE EGOMANIACAL, INFLUENTIAL AND JUST PLAIN WEIRD OWNER OF SPACEX, TESLA AND TWITTER, HE WAS AN AWKWARD KID WHO BUILT COMPUTERS AND CHASED GIRLS AT QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY.

**THE ONTARIO YEARS OF THE WORLD'S RICHEST MAN**

BY HALEY STEINBERG

# FEW PEOPLE DRAW AS MUCH ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES AS ELON MUSK.

In some ways, he can't help it. When a person is worth about $180 billion (US)—making him, at age 51, the wealthiest individual on the planet—people are bound to be curious. But Musk is also the type of guy who wants you to look. The type of guy who, in April 2022, struck a $44-billion deal to buy Twitter, bragged that he did it so he could "help humanity," then spent the summer very publicly trying to get out of paying up. The type of guy who, two days before finally closing the headline-making purchase in late October, changed his Twitter bio to "Chief Twit" and posted a video of himself walking into the company's San Francisco headquarters carrying a white porcelain sink, captioning it, with a resounding comedic thud, "Let that sink in!" And the type of guy who proceeded to ruthlessly jettison half of his inherited staff, ominously warning everyone else to work harder (something he calls "being hardcore"). Musk is so odd, so ambitious and so mercurial that it's easy to forget he's also brilliant. Can all of those extremes coexist in one human? Normally, no. But Musk is not normal. He's earned nearly everything he has by being smart—and by possessing a lifelong, near-maniacal sense of self-belief.

Musk is like an alien doing his best impersonation of a human. Unsurprisingly, he has always been somewhat of an outcast. He was born in Pretoria, South Africa. His mother, Maye, was a dietician and model. (She'd go on to become a CoverGirl and appear in a Beyoncé video.) His father, Errol, was an engineer who worked in property development and emerald mining. Musk has said that he was raised first by books—particularly Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* sci-fi series—and then by his parents. When he was eight, they divorced. Musk and his younger siblings, Kimbal and Tosca, went to live with Maye. By the time he was 10, he'd started to feel sorry for Errol, who seemed sad and lonely without his family. Musk decided to join his dad in Lone Hill, a suburb of Johannesburg. The move turned out to be a terrible mistake. Musk has since described his father as someone who "will plan evil." Errol, in his defence, has said he's been accused of many things, among them being a "rat" and a "shit," but stresses that he loves his kids. (Musk once tried to mend things with his father as an adult, but it didn't go well. He has since severed their relationship.)

School was hardly a respite. Musk was mercilessly bullied as a teen. While his nerdy exploits hinted at his nascent talent—by age 12, he'd sold a space-themed PC game called *Blastar* to a computer magazine for $500—they weren't exactly cool. Plus, he was small, the youngest in his class, and he struggled to fit into the school's macho culture. Gangs of kids hunted him through the hallways, intent on pummelling him. Once, a group of brawny boys threw him down a set of stairs, resulting in a trip to the hospital and a week out of school. The constant harassment didn't ease until Musk turned 16, hit six feet and began learning karate, judo and wrestling. After puberty, he got into a fight with the biggest bully in his school and, at least in Musk's telling, knocked him out with a single punch. It taught him a lesson: never try to appease a bully; it's better to slug them in the nose. (The irony, of course, is that these days Musk is the bully.)

At 17, he fantasized about escaping apartheid-era South Africa, moving overseas and chasing the American dream. Canada was the closest he could get, at least initially. Maye was born in Regina, and branches of her family remained scattered across the country. Musk's plans hinged on staying with a great-uncle in Montreal—a man who, he discovered upon landing at the Montreal airport in June 1988, had since moved to Minnesota. Unbothered, Musk bought a cross-Canada hop-on, hop-off bus ticket for $100. He travelled over to Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and hitched a ride to his second cousin's house, where he got to work shovelling out grain bins at a nearby farm. When that got old, he moved on to splitting logs in Vancouver and then cleaning a lumber mill boiler room for $18 an hour. But hard labour wasn't what Musk envisioned for his future.

Two years later, in the summer of 1990, he landed a sales internship at Microsoft Canada, travelling around southern Ontario and meeting with potential clients. It was a slog, but Musk found the challenge invigorating. His boss, David Carter, expected the 19-year-old to be intimidated, at least at first, but he was fearless, excitable and wildly enthusiastic. Carter remembers him returning to the office at the end of each week carrying a stack of leads ripped out of the Yellow Pages. He'd circle every company he met with and scrawl his observations next to each. To break the ice with dealers, he'd do card tricks. He'd talk about

## ELON TIMELINE

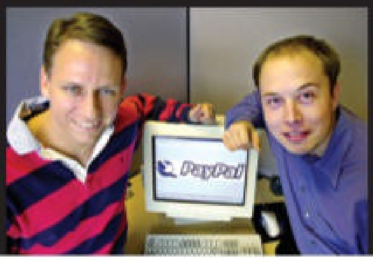
**1971:** Musk is born in Pretoria, South Africa.

**1984:** At age 12, he creates his first video game, *Blastar*. A magazine pays him $500 to publish the source code.

**1988:** Musk moves to Canada and, in fall 1990, enrols at Queen's University.

**1995:** Musk founds his first company, Zip2, in Palo Alto.

**1999:** Compaq Computer Corporation buys Zip2, and Musk walks away with $22 million. He uses the windfall to found X.com, a precursor to PayPal.



**2000:** Musk marries one of his Queen's girlfriends, Justine Wilson, with whom he has twins and triplets. They divorce in 2008.

PAYPAL BY AP IMAGES

any new technology to anyone who would listen. In the burgeoning tech world, Musk saw boundless opportunity. He’d tell his boss, *You could do it that way, or you could build this new thing*. Officially, Musk was just an intern, but he didn’t act like one. As Carter put it to me, “He didn’t shy away from having an opinion.”

**IN SCHOOL, MUSK WAS AWKWARD AND SEEMED IMPERVIOUS TO THE FEELINGS OF OTHERS—QUALITIES THAT WOULD LATER CAUSE PROBLEMS IN SILICON VALLEY**

Come fall, Musk was ready to start university. He debated studying either physics and engineering at the University of Waterloo or business and commerce at Queen’s University. After visiting both campuses, he chose Queen’s—not because of the academics but because it had more girls, and Musk didn’t want to spend his college time with, as he would later put it, “a bunch of dudes.” His next years in Kingston would prove to be formative. There, Musk met his first wife, Justine Wilson, his best bud, Navaid Farooq, and the fellow computer programmers who would go on to help him build his early companies. It was also where he contemplated the big ideas that would eventually turn him into the tech industry’s most controversial rock star: electric vehicles, solar energy, space travel and galactic colonization. By the time he finished his post-secondary studies, Musk had decided that he could do whatever he wanted. Make a fortune. Become famous. Shape the world.

*Musk celebrates his 18th birthday (above) and, a few years later, poses with his brother, Kimbal, and their grandmother on a 1992 trip to Toronto*

BIRTHDAY COURTESY OF MAYE MUSK; TORONTO COURTESY OF KIMBAL MUSK; MUSK IN CAR AND MUSK WITH RILEY BY GETTY IMAGES

QUEEN’S IS ONE OF Canada’s oldest and most prestigious universities. It was founded in honour of Queen Victoria by the Presbyterian Church, and its sprawling campus is dotted with limestone buildings that evoke both its religious and royal roots. Musk lived in the blander, newer Victoria Hall, a chunky X-shaped stone building that had, likely to his delight, gone co-ed in 1988. His dorm room was on the international floor, where Canadian students were paired with students from abroad. There, he met Navaid Farooq, a Geneva-raised fellow strategy gamer who remains one of his closest friends. Later on, Farooq would acknowledge that Musk didn’t make friends easily but was incredibly loyal to those he had. (Farooq is just as loyal—when asked for insight on Musk, he said he first needed Musk’s permission in writing. Musk himself never responded to interview requests.) The pair bonded over the video game *Civilization*, in which players lead their empires through several millennia, exploring, conquering and settling new territories. For the first time, Musk had found his ilk. “We were the kinds of people that can be by ourselves at a party and not feel awkward,” Farooq told Ashlee Vance, author of the 2015 book *Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX and the Quest for a Fantastic Future*.

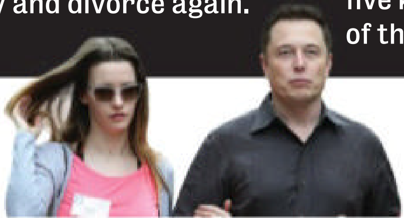
At Queen’s, students and teachers alike respected Musk. They didn’t mock his ambitious ideas; they encouraged them. Unlike in high school, nerds weren’t considered losers. Musk was intense and competitive, interested and interesting. Even in a sea of genius strivers, he stood out. By all accounts, he wanted it that way. In his spare time, he entered public speaking competitions. To make extra cash, he created a small-scale computer empire out of his dorm room. He’d build customized tech—in his words, a “tricked out gaming machine” or a “simple word processor”— for cheaper than what you could find in a store, then sell it to students for a profit. His services also included removing computer viruses and solving general tech issues for other students. In his uniquely immodest way, Musk has said of that time, “I could pretty much fix any problem.”

In 1991, his brother, Kimbal, joined him at Queen’s. By then, the whole Musk family, minus Errol, had moved to Canada. Those who knew them at the time have described the Musk brothers as polite and ambitious, but Kimbal was the more personable and charming of the two. Elon, though enthusiastic and affable in his own way, could come off as awkward and impervious to the feelings of others—a quality that would cause problems, as well as successes, in his early Silicon Valley ventures. In their spare time, the brothers would pore over the *Globe and Mail*, pinpointing important people they wanted to meet. Then they’d cold-call them and ask them to lunch. This was how they came to know Peter Nicholson, a top executive at Scotiabank. It took the brothers six months to get on Nicholson’s calendar, but they succeeded. Nicholson was impressed by their gumption and ended up offering Musk a summer internship at the bank. There, Musk met a young finance whiz named Harris Fricker, who, along with a friend of Fricker’s named Christopher Payne,

**2002:** eBay acquires PayPal, leaving Musk with roughly $180 million. He uses more than half of it to launch SpaceX and invests another $70 million in Tesla, of which he becomes CEO in 2008.

**2010:** Musk makes a cameo in *Iron Man 2*, telling Tony Stark that he has an idea for an electric jet.

**2010:** Musk marries English actor Talulah Riley. Over the next six years, they divorce, remarry and divorce again.



**2014:** Dissatisfied with his sons’ education, Musk founds an exclusive private school now known as Astra Nova, which the *Washington Post* describes as “a secretive laboratory school for brilliant kids who love flamethrowers.” In its first year, his five kids make up more than half of the school’s student body.

**2015:** Musk co-founds OpenAI, a research lab dedicated to developing human-friendly artificial intelligence. Then comes Neuralink, a company that essentially wants to create cyborgs.

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would go on to become one of the four co-founders of the online bank X.com, a predecessor of PayPal.

Another fateful meeting took place during this time. Justine Wilson was a fellow Queen's student and an aspiring writer from Peterborough, Ontario. To an immediately smitten Musk, she was, as he later said, "the hot chick on campus"—smart, attractive and a black belt in tae kwon do. The feeling wasn't mutual. Wilson has said that she was looking to fall in love with a motorcycle-riding, James Dean–esque "Romeo in a dark-brown leather jacket." Instead, she got a clean-cut, baby-faced coder. He first approached her as she was heading up the steps to her dorm. He said he'd met her at a party, one she knew she hadn't attended. Years later, Musk confessed that he'd noticed her from across the common room and orchestrated the chance meeting. He invited Wilson out for ice cream, and she agreed to the date. But, when Musk went to her room to pick her up, he found a note from Wilson saying she couldn't make it. Hours later, after gathering intel on her whereabouts and favourite ice cream flavour—chocolate chip—Musk surprised Wilson in the student centre as she pored over her Spanish studies, two melting ice cream cones in his hands.

"The man does not take no for an answer," Wilson later wrote in an explosive *Marie Claire* piece on their relationship. "I do think of him as the Terminator. He locks his gaze onto something and says, 'It shall be mine.'" That was as true with girls as it was with everything else. Once, on a psychology exam, Wilson scored 97 per cent to Musk's 98. The 1 per cent difference wasn't enough to make Musk feel like the clear winner, so he went to their professor and successfully argued for a perfect grade. Wilson and Musk dated on and off for years. Whenever she seemed distant, he would double-down on his pursuit of her, calling nonstop. Her friends found him odd: when they tried to hug him, he'd just stand there, stiff and unresponsive, like a short-circuited robot. Still, Musk and Wilson married in January 2000 and went on to have six children: a set of twins and triplets as well as a son who died in infancy. (Musk now has nine children—in addition to those he had with Wilson, he has a son and a daughter with on-again, off-again paramour Grimes and another set of twins that he had in secret with Neuralink executive Shivon Zilis. He has claimed that the high number is because he needs to do his part to stave off "population collapse.")

Despite excelling academically at Queen's, Musk was dissatisfied. He wanted more and pined for the seemingly limitless potential of the US. One of his early acquaintances told me that Musk seemed to view his Ontario years as a stepping stone: "Elon was always looking for greener pastures." He needed a playing field big enough for his grandiose dreams. So, only two years into his tenure at Queen's, he made the jump to the American Ivy League, transferring to the University of Pennsylvania on a scholarship. He believed that a degree from an American institution would add jet fuel to his career. At Penn, he delved into solar power and alternative energy, writing dense papers and building concepts for a research database that resembled today's online search engines. He also decided that he was done with student housing. He and his roommate, Adeo Ressi, now an entrepreneur, investor and Silicon Valley fixture who runs the Founder Institute, dumped their dorm and rented a large house. To help pay for it, the budding entrepreneurs turned it into a nightclub. On a good night, they attracted up to 1,000 people—though Musk himself was more likely to be holed up in his room gaming than partying.

He graduated from Penn with two degrees—a bachelor of science in physics and, from the university's Wharton School, a bachelor of arts in economics—while also holding down Silicon Valley summer internships at a video game start-up and a company focused on space-based weapons and alternative fuel for cars. Initially, he planned to complete his PhD at Stanford, but despite being accepted, he never enrolled. That would have been the slow-and-steady route. It was 1995, the internet was beckoning and an impatient, determined Musk was ready to lay his claim to it. Kimbal, who had graduated from Queen's, joined him in the Valley, and the brothers got to work. Their first order of business: recruit all the young, hungry, hyper-capable go-getters they knew from their time in Ontario.

THE MUSK BROTHERS' FIRST venture was a searchable internet-based business directory that linked to online maps. They gave it a charmless and forgettable name—Global Link Information Network—but later rebranded as Zip2. The idea for the business, a mix of Yelp and Google Maps, came to Musk during one of his internships. There, he witnessed a fumbled pitch by a Yellow Pages salesperson about creating online listings and got to thinking about how to help businesses get on the internet. As usual, he was abundantly confident that he could pull it off. According to Vance's biography, he told Kimbal, "These guys don't know what they're talking about." He did.

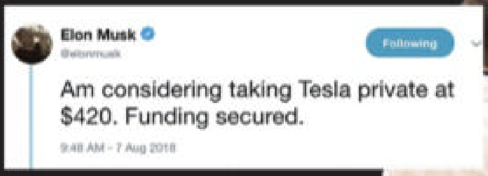
Even in his early 20s, Musk had a relentless vision, which might explain how he was able to convince a bunch of Canadian college boys to ditch their prospects at other, more established institutions, hop across the border and join him in the dot-com boom. They were drawn not just by the breadth of his knowledge—business acumen as well as a keen mind for physics and science—but also by his unwavering, dog-with-a-bone focus. Musk wooed (or wore down) Queen's classmates Michael Serbinis, Christopher Smith and Dominic Thompson into working at Zip2. Each would go on to achieve their own success, modest compared with Musk's, huge by any other standard: Serbinis became the co-founder of Kobo and the CEO of the digital health platform League, Smith became a vice-president at Telus, and Thompson became a senior account director at a Colorado communications company. At the time, Serbinis was working at Microsoft's campus in Redmond,

MUSK WITH GRIMES BY GETTY IMAGES

→ **2017:** Tesla releases the Model 3, and Musk childishly points out that the company's fleet—Models S, 3 and X—spells "sex."

**2018:** Musk launches his Tesla Roadster into space aboard a SpaceX rocket. It's currently on its third orbit around the sun.

**2018:** To humour his new girlfriend, the Canadian musician Grimes, Musk tweets about taking Tesla private at $420 a share, a stoner joke that costs him his position as chairman and tens of millions of dollars in fines.

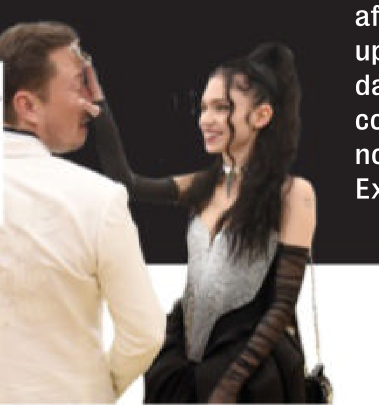


Elon Musk
@elonmusk

Am considering taking Tesla private at $420. Funding secured.

9:48 AM - 7 Aug 2018

**2020:** Musk and Grimes name their baby boy X Æ A-Xii (and can't agree on how to pronounce it). The following year, months after splitting up, they have a daughter, the comparatively normally named Exa Dark Sideræl.



Washington. Then, in 1996, the Musk brothers invited him to join them in Palo Alto—offering a couch to sleep on and a salary of $0.

But it was an opportunity to have a hand in building something from the ground up. Plus, Serbinis thought it sounded like fun. And it was. The timing couldn't have been better: in 1996, businesses were clueless about the internet, and many didn't see the point of even having a website. The Queen's boys had their work cut out for them. They needed to convince retailers, restaurants, salons and other businesses to go where their customers would increasingly be—on the web. Today, Errol says he helped his sons kick off their business with a $28,000 cash infusion; Musk adamantly denies it, saying the money came from a small group of angel investors and their own hustling. Either way, the brothers were able to rent a tiny office space at 430 Sherman Avenue in Palo Alto, license a database of business listings in the Bay Area and purchase the necessary computer equipment. In a lucky break, Musk managed to score digital mapping technology, from a company called Navteq, for free.

**MUSK HAD A RELENTLESS VISION. IT HELPED HIM CONVINCE A BUNCH OF CANADIAN COLLEGE BOYS TO HOP THE BORDER AND JOIN HIM IN THE DOT-COM BOOM**

*Musk pursued beautiful women on campus. Here, he's with one of his university girlfriends, Jennifer Gwynne, and his mother, Maye, in winter 1995*

MUSK WITH GWYNNE AND MOM BY RR AUCTION, TWITTER BY GETTY IMAGES

He wrote the original code while Kimbal headed up the sales operation. Serbinis was one of the company's first 10 employees. During his first weekend in Palo Alto, he worked 72 hours straight. That pace wouldn't change: the small team worked constantly, always chasing funding and customers and rarely leaving the dinky Sherman Avenue space, where they ate and slept (Musk often on the floor). The office had unreliable plumbing, and its internet connection came via an Ethernet cable that Musk strung down the stairwell to the business below. Even though he was an immature 25-year-old with acne, Musk and his drive to make Zip2 prosperous spurred everyone else on. Several early employees attribute the company's success to Musk's Captain Ahab–like determination. As Serbinis has said, "He has an incredible, insatiable desire to win."

That doesn't mean everyone enjoyed working with him. According to Serbinis, company culture "wasn't big on Elon's priority list." Serbinis had grown up playing sports, and to him, the structure of a start-up was akin to that of a team. It was a group of people with clearly defined roles working together, not a hierarchy. But Musk didn't see things that way. He was at the top, he had the vision and the plan to achieve it, and it was up to everyone else to fall in line. He was the textbook definition of a difficult boss. "What really surprises me is that he's been as successful as he has," an early Silicon Valley colleague told me. "He doesn't have many of the qualities you'd see in a classic leader. But I guess that's worked for him in some ways."

Soon, the team had a working product, and venture capital funding followed. In early 1996, the California VC group Mohr Davidow Ventures invested $3 million in Zip2 and hired Rich Sorkin as CEO, pushing Musk into the role of chief technology officer. In 1999, Compaq Computer Corporation bought Zip2 for $307 million in cash. Musk's take was $22 million, and he poured most of that into his next Silicon Valley venture, the online bank X.com. About a year after that, X.com merged with Peter Thiel's Confinity to form PayPal. Musk's early tenure there was marred by disagreements over his role and strategic vision, but that didn't stop the company's rise. In 2002, eBay paid $1.5 billion in stock for the company, a deal that netted Musk $165 million.

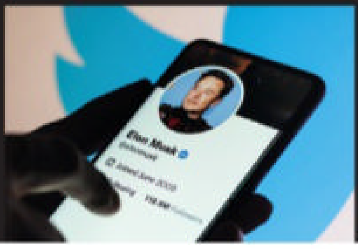
Those windfalls provided funding for everything that came next: SpaceX, which in turn begat Tesla and OpenAI and Twitter. Lately, Musk makes headlines not for ground-breaking entrepreneurial exploits but for personal and political controversies. Twitter, which has given him his biggest platform yet, has a lot to do with it. Unlike an $80,000 Tesla, Twitter is accessible to anyone with an internet connection. It touches the lives of over 200 million daily active users. Musk has always wanted a global audience, and now he has it. In his first month as self-described Chief Twit, he reinstated Donald Trump's account, told his 119.2 million followers to vote Republican and relaxed the site's content moderation. Try to ignore him, and his antics will earworm into your consciousness regardless. We're all waiting to see what he'll do next.

For now, Musk appears to be operating Twitter in the same way as his earlier ventures—albeit on a much larger scale. He plucked the best and brightest from his Ontario circle to join him in Palo Alto, and at Twitter 2.0, he's pulled from his employee pool at Tesla and surrounded himself with a small army of top software engineers. Anyone who isn't down with the cause is disposable; if you're not with Musk, you're against him. That's the way it's always been. The big question is whether his tactless, tried-and-tested strategy will work once again. Musk may be the only one who believes he'll steer Twitter successfully, but that's all he's ever needed.

**2021:** Musk overtakes Jeff Bezos as the richest person in the world, with a net worth of roughly $300 billion. That number would later drop, but Musk remains on top.

**2021:** Musk hosts *Saturday Night Live*, playing a fictional financial expert on Weekend Update. The value of Dogecoin plummets after he jokingly admits that "it's a hustle."

**2022:** Musk fathers another set of twins, his eighth and ninth children, with Canadian Neuralink executive Shivon Zilis. A month later, he tweets, "Population collapse due to low birth rates is a much bigger risk to civilization than global warming."



**2022:** Musk buys Twitter for $44 billion, fires its CEO and CFO, lays off about half of its 7,500 employees and dissolves its board, giving himself unfettered control of the company.

After my dad died, I found a new family in a white-power gang. I spent years dressing like a skinhead, fighting strangers and committing petty crimes before I realized the absurdity of my beliefs.

INSIDE THE TWISTED WORLD OF TORONTO'S WHITE SUPREMACIST MOVEMENT

# WHITE LIES

BY LAUREN MANNING

PORTRAIT BY
MARKIAN LOZOWCHUK

I GREW UP IN WHITBY, A TOWN SO HOMOGENEOUS THAT PEOPLE CALLED IT "WHITE-BY."

My mom, Jeanette, worked in land surveying, and my dad, Paul, was a detective constable with the Toronto Police Service who went after sexual predators and dealt with at-risk youth. They were loving and protective of my younger brother and me, keeping us away from kids they thought would be a bad influence and enforcing a strict routine: wake up, go to school, come home, do homework, go to bed. Once, when I got home five minutes late, my dad lost his mind: "I thought you'd been kidnapped!" I was too young to realize that his concern stemmed from his work.

Growing up, I wasn't comfortable in my own skin. I woke up many mornings wanting to be someone else. The summer I turned 14, my parents enrolled me in a week-long music camp. I knew immediately that I didn't fit in. Most kids played guitar, bass or drums and dressed the rock 'n' roll part—ripped jeans, band T-shirts, dyed hair. I played clarinet and wore track pants and baggy T-shirts, my hair pin-straight and short like a boy's. I was confused about my sexuality, which made me feel lost and alone. Over the course of the summer, I gained a few pounds, which made my already fragile self-esteem even more brittle. I felt ugly and fat and wanted to hide. I struggled academically. It was hard to communicate why, so I would throw my hands up and say, "I'm stupid!" My parents tried to tell me it wasn't so, but no one could convince me otherwise.

In 2006, when I was 16, my dad found out he had acute myeloid leukemia. I was devastated. He was my best friend, always around, always encouraging. He'd taken a special interest in my woodworking class, enthusing about everything I'd made. It was weird not having him at home. After two months of chemotherapy at Princess Margaret Hospital, he looked like a skeleton, his sagging flesh hanging off his bones. By the end of the year, he'd fallen into a coma. The last time I saw him was on a Saturday night in January of 2007, hours before he died. His death left a deep void inside me. It took a long time for me to accept that he was gone.

Punk rock and metal became my safe haven. The loud, aggressive, I-want-to-beat-someone-up sound left me feeling euphoric, and the lyrics assured me that outcasts like me mattered. With my headphones on, I could block out whatever was going on in my mind. I started hanging out with metalheads at school and drinking heavily. I couldn't see the point of life when I was sober.

That November, I was on the Facebook page of Nokturnal Mortum, a metal band I liked, when I received a message from a 26-year-old guy from Toronto. I'll call him Donny. "I was wondering if you're NS or just listening to NSBM?" he wrote. I didn't know what he meant, but I soon learned that NSBM stood for National Socialist black metal. Nokturnal Mortum's growling lyrics, although hard to understand, were filled with messages of white supremacy. They spoke of taking back land that, in their view, rightfully belong to them. When Donny asked me what other bands I liked, I gave him a list, not realizing that some of them were racist. I didn't ask what "being NS" meant because I didn't want to sound stupid. I just enjoyed having someone to talk to.

A few days later, Donny messaged me again to tell me that a friend of his in Ottawa had been beaten up by a couple of Black guys. "This is how us white people get treated," he wrote. "And Blacks get away with this shit." I wasn't exactly sure what Donny meant, but it sounded a lot like what my grandfather used to say. Poppa disliked all visible minorities as well as Jewish and LGBTQ people. When Donny repeated that rhetoric, it seemed familiar, and I believed it. Still, I didn't know how to respond, so I changed the subject, writing about the preppy kids at school, whom I couldn't stand. When Donny called them "a bunch of mainstream sheep," I laughed. The label fit so well. I liked the way Donny spoke to me, as though he'd known me forever. "You're smarter than everyone else around you," he said. "The world needs more girls like you." He made me feel like I mattered.

Over the next month, Donny began referring to "the movement." He said that Jews controlled the world, that Black people were trying to get back at white people for slavery, and that the education system was trying to instill a sense of shame and guilt in white kids just for being white. He said he was part of a resistance movement fighting to ensure that the white population survived. The movement had "crews" that could be identified by symbols: Dr. Martens boots with white laces, specific tattoos and coded language. He told me about Stormfront, a white nationalist, neo-Nazi internet forum, and I created an account, "educating" myself about how white liberals were being brainwashed. This new knowledge made me feel like I was better than everyone else.

I first met Donny in person in December, when he came out to Whitby by train. I thought he was cool, and his crew, which I thought of as a secret club, sounded more interesting than hanging around drinking with my classmates. So, when he invited me to join, I said yes. Later that month, I skipped school to sneak off to Toronto and meet the crew. There were about 10 of them, mostly guys in their late teens and 20s, and they called themselves SD, from the German word *Sicherheitsdienst*, the intelligence and security division of the German SS and Nazi Party. I marvelled at how they seemed to have one another's backs. They accepted me without question. With them, I found a sense of family I'd been missing at home. My mom had always been closer to my brother. She and I fought all the time: about my grades, my attitude, the rhetoric I had increasingly been dropping into conversation. Without my dad's friendship and love, I felt I didn't have a place in my own family.

I wish I had known how misguided my thinking was, how dangerous it was to cast my lot with Donny and his crew. Their beliefs were toxic, harmful and totally divorced from reality. But I was angry, hurt and rebellious, and Donny showed me where to direct my rage. He took me to Holocaust denier presentations and walked me through ethnically diverse neighbourhoods near Bathurst and St. Clair. "We're being wiped out," he told me as we passed the homes of brown-skinned families. I believed everything Donny said and began defining myself as a white-power skinhead. I liked the sense of importance that came with belonging to a group fighting for a cause, something I'd never felt before.

That spring, Donny gave me a set of Panzer boots. They were steel-toed with white laces, tangible proof that I was part of the movement. On June 22, just days after I graduated from high school, my mom gave me an ultimatum: either I start behaving like I wanted to be part of the family, giving up Donny and everything he'd taught me, or she'd throw me out. "You decide," she said. "Who's more important to you: your family or your friends?" It was an easy choice.

AFTER LEAVING HOME, I took the GO Train into Toronto and met up with Donny. Initially, I slept on the floor in the basement of an internet café at Yonge and Bloor, and then I moved to the Palace Arms, a cheap now-defunct rooming house at King and Strachan. Donny used stolen and fabricated credit cards to buy stuff. I got a job at a grocery store and, later, washed dishes at a '50s-style diner. It wasn't great, but at least we were free to hang out with our crew after work.

Members came and went, but Donny and I were in it for the long haul. Though we weren't in a romantic relationship, we spent all our time together. He taught me how to armbar, hip throw and hit with force, then made me the group's enforcer. We'd get into street fights with anyone who gave us trouble. All it took was for someone to yell "Nazi scum" and we'd start brawling. We spent a lot of time partying in the forested areas around High Park and Old Mill, pretending to be Vikings, setting up bonfires and drinking. I spoke at crew meetings, using aggressive, over-the-top language to keep the guys' interest. They listened to me and seemed to respect me. I felt validated, powerful and smart. After years of feeling invisible, I felt seen.

I wanted to prove that I was committed to the movement, so I shaved the left side of my head and got "1488" tattooed on my neck: "14" for a notorious white-supremacist phrase called the 14 Words ("We must secure the existence of our race and a future for white children") and "88" for Heil Hitler, or HH, H being the eighth letter of the alphabet. I thought that, if I wore this angry mask, adopted this badass persona, everyone would be afraid of me and no one could harm me.

Three weeks after I left home, a police officer from Durham visited me at the Palace Arms. My mom had asked him to check up on me. She'd been distraught since I left, sending me emails offering to work things out. At one point, I agreed to move back home, but when I failed to follow her rules—observing a curfew, cutting contact with the movement—she kicked me out a second time. After that, I decided I'd never speak to her again.

One night, Donny disappeared without saying where he was going. I didn't make much of it until he showed up the next morning. His eyes went wide as he grinned. "I broke into your mom's place," he said, wound up with excitement. Then he showed me my mom's Mastercard. "Get showered and make yourself look good. We're going shopping."

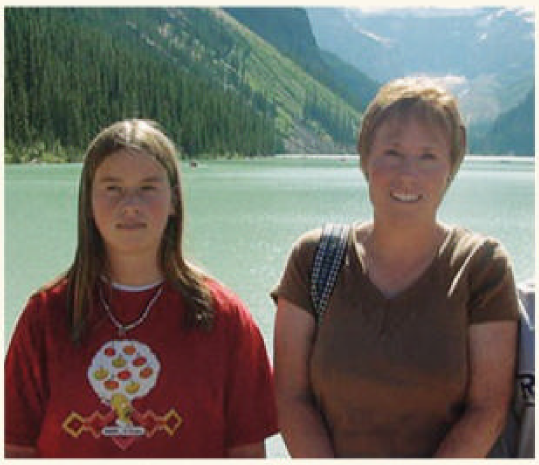
The back of my neck was tingling, a sign that something bad was happening. I thought about walking away but realized that I wasn't in any position to argue. Donny, who could sense my hesitation, knew it too. "You're homeless. You've got nowhere else to go," he said. "Get dressed."

Donny bought me a fake ID bearing my mom's name and my picture, and we went to a Future Shop in North York, where we bought a MacBook and an HP printer. The charge: $2,858.86.

Over the years, I'd learned to ignore stuff I didn't want to deal with and block emotions that might make me vulnerable. Still, I wanted reassurance. "Should we have done that? Ripped off my mom?" I asked. "She deserved it," Donny replied.

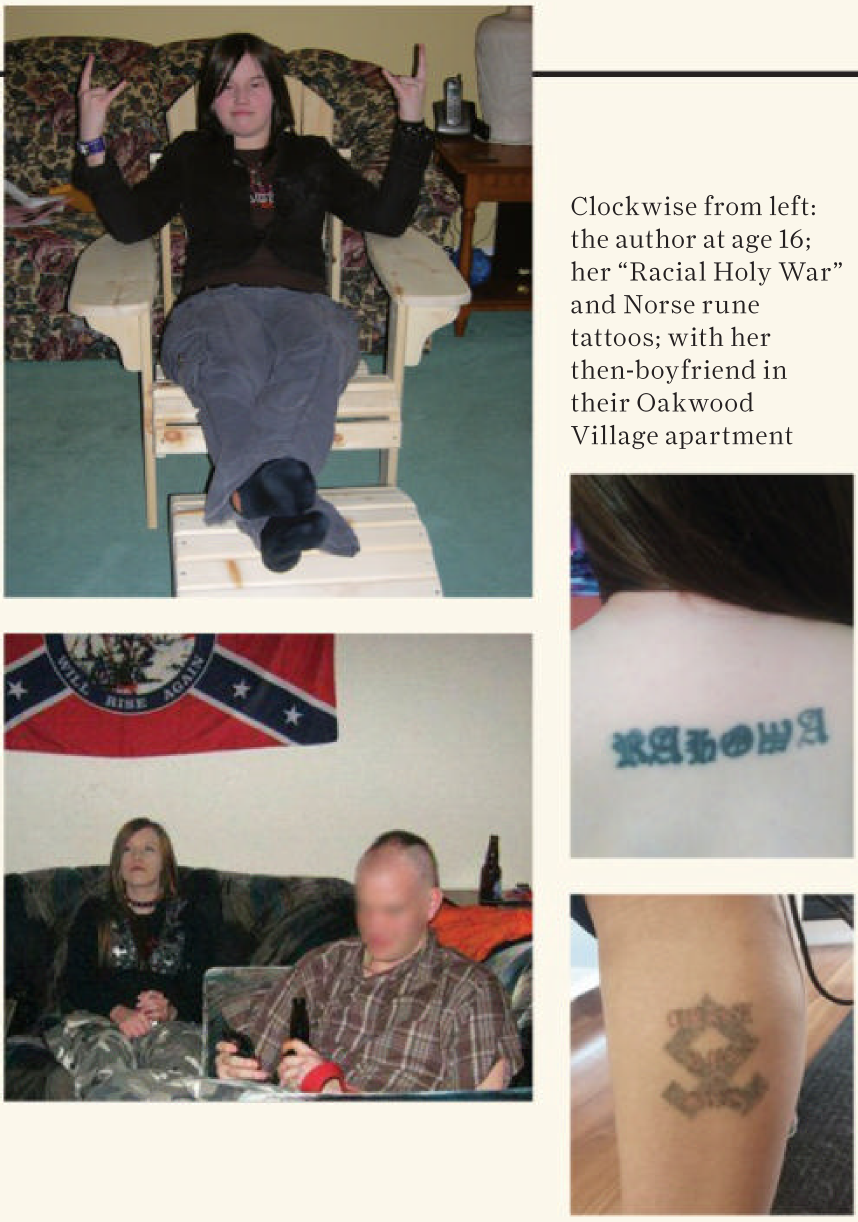
A little later, Donny introduced me to Paul Fromm, a former teacher with ties to the Ku Klux Klan. He had founded the Canadian Association for Free Expression, which advocates for racists, antisemites and Holocaust deniers who are being prosecuted for hate crimes. His handshake was firm, and he took a special interest in me. "It's refreshing to meet a young lady who isn't brainwashed by MTV culture," he said. Fromm was impressed by my dedication to the movement. He asked me and my crew to pass out flyers at his speeches and put pamphlets beneath doors in west-end apartment buildings.

As the weeks wore on, Donny and I started bickering. He could be funny and had initially seemed like an older brother or father



Clockwise from top left: the author with her late father, Paul; at age 15; vacationing at Lake Louise with her mother, Jeanette

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



Clockwise from left: the author at age 16; her "Racial Holy War" and Norse rune tattoos; with her then-boyfriend in their Oakwood Village apartment

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

figure. But, when he started picking fights with guys he called "Listo-bums"—people who drank Listerine to get drunk—I began to see that he wasn't the person I'd thought he was. One afternoon, a homeless Indigenous man overdosed in front of me, his face going colourless. I called 911 and stayed with him until first responders arrived. Despite my racist rants, somewhere deep down I knew that this was how you were supposed to treat another human being. This guy needed my help, no matter his ethnicity. But Donny showed no empathy, and I began to wonder if he had his head screwed on right. I didn't find him or his antics funny anymore, so I wasn't upset when, one evening in late October 2008, he abruptly took off for BC, saying he was sick of Ontario. He sent an endless stream of emails asking me to join him, then called one day threatening to kill himself if I didn't come. I could tell that he was trying to manipulate me, plus I had a good job at the diner that I didn't want to give up. When he called the next day to tell me he hadn't done it, I finally told him I'd had enough.

WITH DONNY GONE, our crew dissolved, and I went looking for a new one. At the time, there were a handful of white-power groups operating in and around Toronto. Online, I'd met a girl who was part of Aryan Nations, a decentralized white supremacist network that had grown out of Idaho. Through Donny, I also knew two members of Combat 18, a violent neo-Nazi group that Canada added to its list of terrorist organizations in 2019. And everyone in the movement knew the Vinland Hammerskins, probably the biggest and most organized group in the city. It had members in Scarborough, Etobicoke and Mississauga, distinguishable by the dual-hammer patches on their jackets. Founded in Texas in the late 1980s, the Hammerskins hosted white-power concerts, preached traditional family values and flirted with the idea of building their own all-white community.

About a month after Donny left, I met a guy loosely associated with Blood and Honour, a UK-based coalition of skinhead gangs that was prominent in BC. He walked into the diner during one of my afternoon shifts, wearing black boots with white laces, so I introduced myself. Before long, we started dating and formed a new crew with some of his friends and people I'd met through Donny. We modelled ourselves after Calgary's Aryan Guard, a neo-Nazi group known for its vandalism and white-power demonstrations. Our home base was a tiny bachelor apartment near Vaughan and Oakwood that we could barely afford to rent.

Members of different white-power groups weren't friendly with one another. Most of us believed the same bullshit, but we didn't get along, often yelling, "You're not the real deal" so that we would have an excuse to fight. Members would sometimes leave one group for another, lured by promises of better organization or better parties. Even members of the same crew, who claimed to have one another's backs, would get into fist fights.

One Friday night, while our crew was partying at the apartment, a young woman passed out on a bed. Her ex, a drug dealer who'd just gotten out of rehab, went over and lay on top of her, groping under her bra and down her pants. My boyfriend and I pulled him off and started beating him up. When another friend tried to get between us, he took a blow to the face and hit the floor. He was unconscious for a while, and then, barely able to talk, he whispered, "Someone help me." I was scared that he would die, so I left to find help. When I stumbled outside, covered in bruises and blood, two Black guys ran toward me, asking if I was okay. Even though I was clearly a skinhead, they offered to help, calling emergency services and staying with us until the ambulance arrived. They even gave us money for a cab ride back from the hospital.

I was stunned. Why were these guys helping us? Every narrative I'd been taught claimed that Black people were out to get us, but the opposite had happened. I realized that the hate I held was based on what I'd read and been told, not on interactions with real people. Their willingness to assist challenged everything I thought I knew. I'd experienced kindness where there shouldn't have been any. For the first time, I was conflicted about my beliefs.

That same winter, our crew burned a Soviet Union flag that hung on the side of a Russian souvenir shop near the apartment. We saw communists, socialists and anarchists as self-hating antiracist white people. Our friend took pictures of my boyfriend saluting in front of the burning flag. Somehow, those pictures ended up on Anti-Racist Canada, a website dedicated to fighting bigotry, and we were all added to their watch list. The crew suspected I'd leaked the pictures because I'd been critical of their infighting and disorganization. Weeks later, after my boyfriend and I broke up, he and three of his friends confronted me about it. "We're going to make this simple," one of them said. "Take off your boots, give them to us and you're free to go."

Taking off my boots would be akin to handing in my resignation, so I refused. As I walked away, I heard footsteps behind me. I felt someone's hands on my head and neck, and the next thing I knew, I was thrown into a brick wall. My head slammed full force into its rough surface. I fell to the ground and passed out. When I came to, dazed and in agony, somebody was pinning me down while several pairs of boots kicked me. I tried and failed to get up and escape until, finally, a security guard came toward us and I heard someone yell, “Run!”

Every part of me was hurting. My head pounded. I felt dizzy and shaky. My lip was bleeding, my knees and back throbbed, and my boots were gone. Luckily, St. Michael’s Hospital wasn’t far away, and I managed to walk to the ER. The doctor who saw me wasn’t white, so I was leery of him examining me. But he was kind, treating me like a human being despite my white-power tattoos. Once again, I was thrown off balance. Someone I’d been taught to hate was willing to overlook the differences between us. I knew I didn’t deserve his kindness.

The attack left me with a brain injury that affected my focus and short-term memory. As I recovered, my attackers spread rumours that I’d turned Antifa—anti-fascist, the total opposite of white supremacist—so I decided to get two new tattoos: a Norse rune that the movement had appropriated for its own use and “Our Race Is Our Nation,” referring to our wish to turn Canada into a white ethnostate. I wanted to prove to myself and everyone else that I was still in the movement. But deep down I was having serious doubts.

I SPENT THE NEXT FEW months bouncing between friends’ couches and shelters around the city: Eva’s Place, Covenant House, Second Base in Scarborough. My goal was self-preservation and I lived minute by minute. I didn’t bother looking for work. I spent the allowance that the shelters gave me on alcohol. It had been a year since I’d moved to Toronto, and I’d been drinking every morning and night. I thought I needed it to get through the day.

The movement gave me freedom, which was what I wanted, but I was desperately lonely. Most of the other guys had families they lived with or at least spoke to. I had no one. Their families let them make their own decisions and run their own lives; my mother seemed to hate me.

Several months after I left home, a friend of my mom’s included me in a group email, a joke she sent to several people. I replied, “Ha ha, thanks,” and she wrote back, “Contact your mom.” I wondered who had died—I figured that was the only reason my mom would want to talk to me. I sent her an email and was surprised when she wrote back. “It’s been very difficult for us,” she said. “We were very disappointed and upset with the breaking in and stealing of my cards. But I still love you and know that the daughter I’m proud of is still there somewhere.”

AN OFFICER WALKED ME TO A TINY JAIL CELL AND SAID, “ALL YOURS. ENJOY”

My mom and I kept emailing, and we eventually agreed to get together for my 19th birthday, in May of 2009. I had dinner with my family, and my mom gave me a new cellphone. Though the interaction was uneasy, it was nice to reconnect with her and my brother.

That summer, a friend invited me to see Kremator, a skinhead rock band, play a show in Etobicoke. There, I met Jan, a Hammerskin member visiting from BC. He and I got along right away. He felt like a long-lost friend. He was a few years older than me, extremely tall and well-built but gentle. Our conversations were rarely about white power. Instead, he wanted to talk about me and things I was interested in, like music and woodworking. I was sad when he returned to BC, but we remained good friends, emailing each other weekly for almost three years. While he never told me directly how disillusioned he was, I think we were both in the same place—tired of the movement but not yet ready to walk away.

As much as I wanted to stay in the city, I was sick of living on the streets, not having enough money for alcohol, food and rent. That fall, my mom offered to let me move back home on two conditions: that I turn myself in to the police for using her credit card and that I get a job or go to school. I agreed, so on the day before Halloween of 2009, she met me at the train station. As soon as we got home, she handed me her phone and said, “Make the call.”

When I did, I was arrested and taken to 17 Division in downtown Oshawa. I was charged with impersonation, forgery, possession of property obtained by crime, fraud under $5,000, and possession and unauthorized use of a stolen credit card. It was dead silent and cold inside the station. An officer walked me down a hallway lined with cells. He stopped before an empty one, opened the door and said, “All yours. Enjoy yourself.” It was about 10 feet by six feet with a small concrete ledge. There was a toilet with no water, no seat and no toilet paper. As usual, I was drunk. I shut down and time became a blur. Every minute felt like an hour.

When I was finally released, the next afternoon, my mom met me at the courthouse. The judge gave me a set of conditions to comply with. I knew two of them had been my mom’s suggestions: “You will pursue and attend education, training or gainful employment. And you will comply with all house rules.” I’d been away from home for more than a year and wasn’t sure I could follow her rules. But, by the time Christmas came around, I was happy to have a roof over my head. The house didn’t feel as much like a prison as it had before I left.

I turned 20 in May of 2010 and spent most of that summer completing my court-mandated 100 hours of community service at the local Salvation Army, where I could zone out while sorting through donated clothes and household goods. I attended drug-and-alcohol education classes, usually with the smell of booze still on my breath. I went out two or three nights a week, sometimes with my then-boyfriend and other members of the movement, drinking until closing time.

That September, I started studying cabinetmaking and woodworking at Humber College. I lived in residence, in a tiny private room with a single bed and a wooden desk. Eventually, the four or five hours I spent in class each day felt like a vacation from my outside life. In the movement, I’d often end up arguing with the guys over stupid stuff, but with my classmates, I didn’t need to compete to be heard. I graduated in September of 2011 and applied to the local carpenters’ union; acceptance required completing a six-week entry-level course. It was a struggle, in part because of the lingering effects of the brain injury from my beating, but I worked hard and was offered a job with a scaffolding company in Toronto as soon as I finished. The job gave me the self-esteem and confidence I had been desperately looking for.

Still, I kept in touch with old friends from my former crews. I considered many of them family. I emailed Jan every week, telling him about moving back in with my mom, getting a new job, guys I was seeing. He was non-judgmental, someone I could be honest with, say anything to. I griped about the way I was treated as a woman in the movement. Men scoffed when I told them I wanted to work in construction. They thought my job was to look pretty and procreate to perpetuate the white race. I even told Jan that I was bisexual, a secret I kept from everyone else in the movement. To them, being gay was unnatural.

> I THOUGHT BLACK PEOPLE WERE OUT TO GET ME, BUT THE OPPOSITE WAS TRUE

One Saturday morning in March 2012, my boyfriend picked me up at the train station. “You know that guy Jan, from out west?” he asked. I hoped he’d tell me that Jan was returning to Ontario. Instead, my boyfriend said, “He died.”

Time stood still, just like it had when I lost my dad. Shivers ran up my spine. This couldn’t be true. When I got home, I googled Jan’s name and found exactly what I hadn’t wanted to believe. He had been stabbed to death. Police said it was the result of a break-in turned deadly and that there was no evidence linking his death to his involvement in white-power groups. Still, someone in the movement sent an email to the media, stating, “It was a hate crime against our people. We will not stop until there is justice for our fallen comrade.”

After Jan’s death, his mother posted an article on the Anti-Racist Canada website. She explained that he had been recruited as a young man but had distanced himself from the movement over time. “Jan was easy prey for a group looking for angry, blond and blue-eyed members,” she wrote. “[His recruitment] was the first time I lost my son. Now I have lost him forever.”

Jan’s death brought me some much-needed clarity. Reading his mother’s post, I began questioning the victim mentality I had adopted for five years. My problems were not the fault of other races or religions. Plenty of other people had lost parents or felt like outcasts and hadn’t chosen to live a life of hate. I had no excuse. I was tired of being angry all the time.

In the summer of 2012, a few months after Jan’s death, I went to my final white-power show. I hadn’t yet told anyone that I’d decided to leave the movement. When a local band went on stage, their singer announced, “This is dedicated to our fallen brother, Jan.” It was like I’d been punched in the gut. They were using his death to promote their cause, something I found disgusting. I had gotten involved in the movement because it made me feel important. Now, I was starting to see things differently. I realized that if I died tomorrow, no one in the movement would really care. I went into the mosh pit, smashing around with everyone else. Thoughts bounced through my mind. Hate, I suddenly understood, was unnatural. Constantly having to warp every situation to fit the movement’s narratives was exhausting. Seeing the world through their lens hadn’t kept me safe. It had imprisoned me.

I decided I needed a change. I’d been drinking heavily almost every day since high school: after work, at home, at parties. The escape it offered had become my lifeline. I managed to stop, but I didn’t like myself or the world around me when I was sober. I was irritable, and every part of my body ached, like I had an unending case of the flu. But, for the first time, I saw all of the dysfunction that existed within the movement. I no longer found the parties interesting. The conversations were boring, the booze-sodden actions stupid. I realized that there had never been any real goals, any worthy causes in the groups and crews I’d belonged to. I no longer agreed with the propaganda I was being fed.

Lauren with her mother, Jeanette, at her childhood home, in Whitby

NO MATTER HOW eager I was to quit the white-power scene, exiting left a void in my life. I’d wrapped my entire identity around the movement. After I left, I started to question who I was. I received harassing calls and threats from members demanding that I stay. “Go fuck yourself,” were the first words I heard when I picked up the phone one night. “You’re a traitor.”

Befriending people who weren’t white was difficult at first. I had to change the hardwiring in my head. I found information online on critical thinking that prompted me to ask myself, *Do any of those old thoughts make sense?* No one had ever asked me to apologize for being white. There was no reason to fear or hate anyone based on their race, no reason to think that they were out to get me. I was the one who had been out to get them.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARKIAN LOZOWCHUK

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When the Unite the Right riot erupted in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, I realized that it wasn't enough to get out—I needed to start making amends for the damage I had caused. I wanted to give back, to create change and to feel good about myself. I contacted Life After Hate, an American non-profit run by former extremists, most of them from the far right, that educates and reforms people wishing to disconnect from extreme ideology and become peaceful members of society. Through their network, I got to know others on the same road as me. It was refreshing to be part of such a group after years of trying so hard to fit in. With them, I didn't need to change—they liked me as I was.

In November 2018, Life After Hate invited me to speak at a conference in Edmonton. As nervous as I was to share my story, I could see how helpful it was for people in the audience who had been through similar experiences. Since then, my mom and I have made it our mission to help other families like us. We've both spoken at events and assisted researchers with studies on hate. I now work full-time for Life After Hate and the Edmonton-based Organization for the Prevention of Violence, counselling former white supremacists on how to leave the movement, while my mom volunteers with Life After Hate's family forum, a support group for parents and relatives of people who have joined extremist movements. Together, my mom and I wrote a book, *Walking Away From Hate*, which tells our story from both of our perspectives. With our publisher, we also created resource guides for parents and teachers. We want to provide people with the tools we never had and to help them understand hate—how people get drawn into it, how it recruits its members and how it is possible to leave and start again.

I'm alarmed by the rise of far-right groups like the Proud Boys. According to the Centre on Hate, Bias and Extremism, there were approximately 100 right-wing extremist groups in Canada in 2015; by 2019, there were nearly three times that many. But I know first-hand that more and more people are leaving lives of hate too. When I meet with "formers," I keep my own story in mind. I try to get to know them as individuals. I ask how their week is going, what's new in their lives, and let them do most of the talking while I listen and try to understand what drove them to these beliefs in the first place. Listening, having an open dialogue and asking questions that challenge their mindsets and core beliefs works far better than arguing or shoving opinions down their throats. I don't debate and I don't judge. They don't need to feel more ostracized than they already do. I am living proof that they can make it out.

After leaving the movement, I was troubled by my tattoos. Whenever I saw them, I was reminded of all of my past mistakes. Over time, I've had them removed or covered. The Celtic cross on my right arm became an hourglass wrapped in vines and roses, signifying how time heals. I covered the Norse rune with a candy skull and oak leaves, symbolizing Jan and another friend, who died by suicide. In August of 2019, I changed my last hate tattoo, RAHOWA (shorthand for "Racial Holy War") between my shoulder blades, into a floral design of a cathedral window. It was a relief to see that toxic ink gradually disappear. Now, at last, I'm free of that chapter of my life and everything that went along with it.

The Bentway

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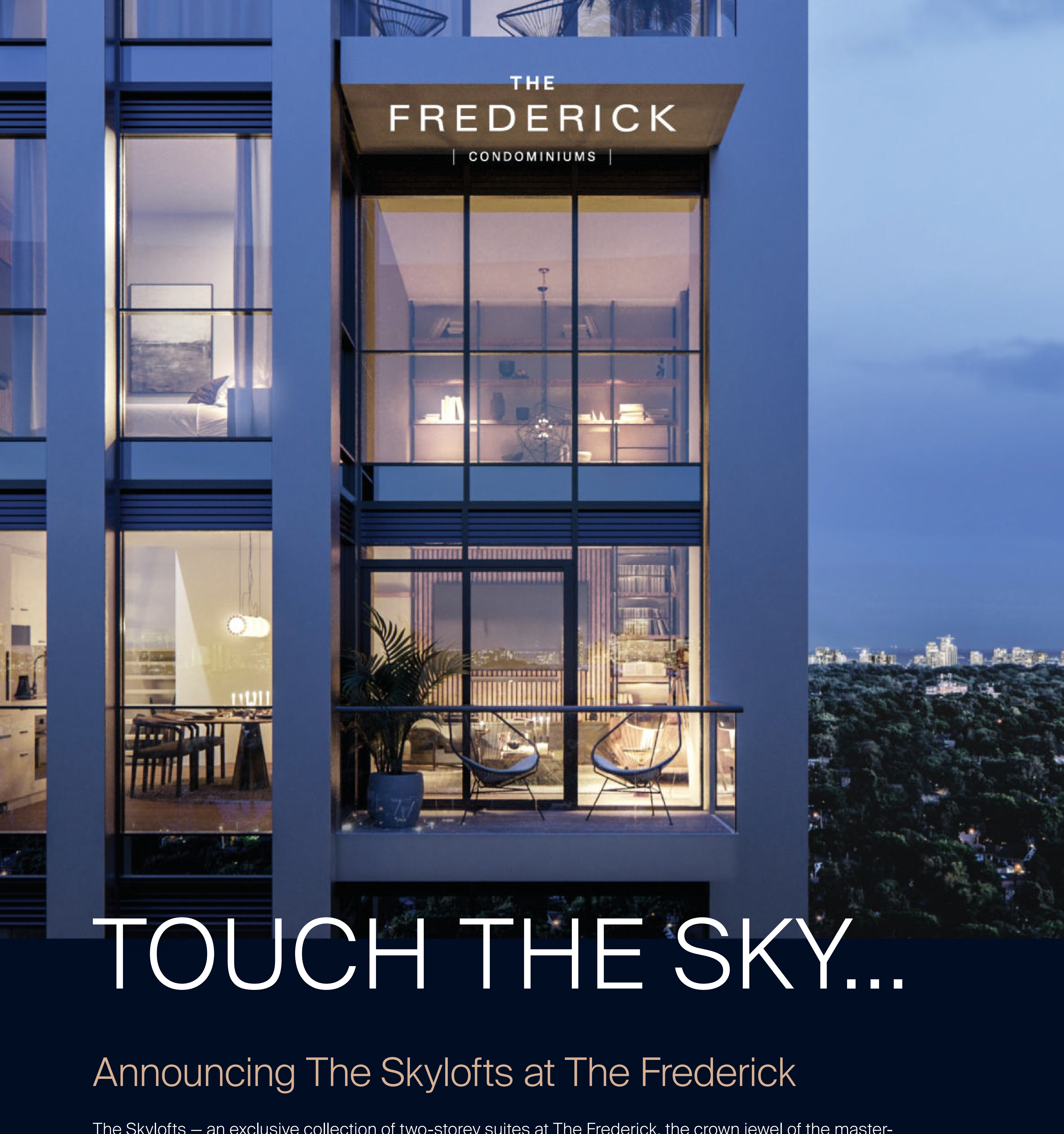

# TOUCH THE SKY...

## Announcing The Skylofts at The Frederick

The Skylofts – an exclusive collection of two-storey suites at The Frederick, the crown jewel of the master-planned Upper East Village community in Leaside. Perched on the 25th and 26th floors of The Frederick, these sumptuously-appointed lofts in the sky feature soaring double-height living rooms, flooded with natural light, and private balconies. Thoughtful floor plans and exquisite finishes put you at home in the lap of luxury.

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# Navigator

TREND WATCH

## Shape Shifters

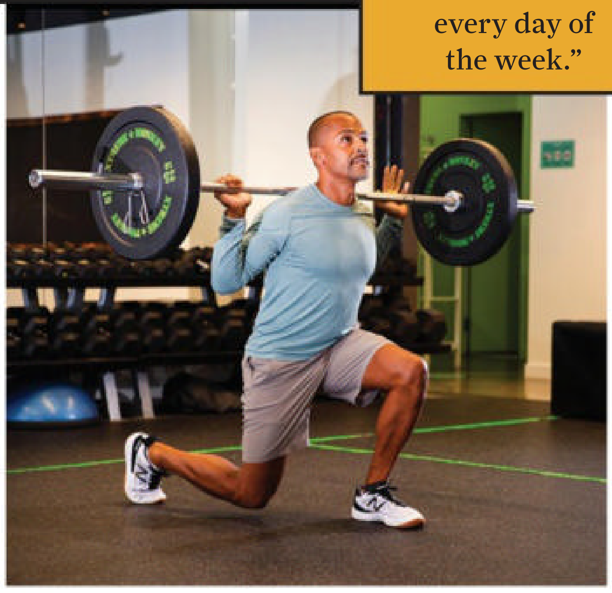
The TikTok and Instagram influencers changing the way Toronto stays fit

BY STEPHANIE GRAY

Personal trainer and *Dated & Related* star Julia Perfetto

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF @JULIAPERFETTO VIA INSTAGRAM

**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"Have active time every day of the week."



## Brent Bishop

THE OG TRAINER
@IAMBISHOP

**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** Instagram
**FOLLOWERS:** 10.8K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Functional strength training

**FAVOURITE MOVE:**
Compound movements like squat presses

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"I love running the Lake Shore pathway. I can stop at the outdoor workout spots along the way and get my functional training in."

"**I OPENED MY FIRST STUDIO** about 14 years ago and haven't looked back. My goal has always been to get people out of their comfort zones. I'm not a believer in 'Cut this out completely' or 'Do this only.' It's about living life to the fullest while taking care of your health as best you can. We didn't have social media when I started out, but now I know that it's a powerful tool for my brand. During the pandemic, I started Move at Noon, a 25-minute lunchtime workout. Anyone who wanted to join could tune in live on Instagram. I was amazed at the response. It kept me feeling very positive and connected to the community."

## Zehra Allibhai

THE MUSLIM ICON
@ZALLIBHAI

**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** Instagram
**FOLLOWERS:** 280K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Quick at-home workouts

**FAVOURITE MOVE:**
Deadlifts and skipping

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"There are so many beautiful trails in the GTA, but I regularly hike the one at Bond Lake in Richmond Hill."

"**I PLAYED A LOT OF SPORTS** and enjoyed fitness when I was growing up. But women aren't encouraged to become athletes in Muslim and South Asian cultures, so I took up a career in kinesiology and personal training. I began sharing my workouts on Instagram, and people would comment on how great it was to see someone working out in a hijab. They weren't comfortable going to gyms, and that's when I realized that there was a need. So my goal became to get people in my community active and then expand outward. I'm not what most people think of when they imagine a fitness influencer. I've had clients say, 'I like that I can't see whether you have a six-pack—it's less intimidating.'"

**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"You have to incorporate health and wellness into your everyday life."

**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"Movement is medicine."

## Azam Taher

THE INTERNATIONAL ATHLETE
@MTFITNESS.EC

**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** Instagram
**FOLLOWERS:** 101K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Functional training

**FAVOURITE MOVE:**
Weighted pull-ups

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"I like to train at Birchmount Park in Scarborough. It has bleachers, a multi-sport field and a huge track nearby."

"**I'M FROM TAJIKISTAN,** and I got into tae kwon do and MMA there. When I came to Canada, my goal was to become a professional athlete at the Olympic level. When that didn't work out, I got into the fitness sector. I've tried posting fancy videos with elaborate production and lots of skin, but I didn't feel good about it. My most-watched video, with over 100,000 saves, was a simple body-weight core workout. No equipment, some music, five exercises. Showing off might be good for one post every six months, but my goal is to help others succeed and live pain-free."

BISHOP COURTESY OF @IAMBISHOP VIA INSTAGRAM, ALLIBHAI COURTESY OF @ZALLIBHAI VIA INSTAGRAM, TAHER COURTESY OF @MTFITNESS.EC VIA INSTAGRAM

**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"Be consistent even when the motivation isn't there."

## Julia Perfetto

THE REALITY TV STAR
@JULIAPERFETTO

**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** TikTok
**FOLLOWERS:** 249.4K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Bodybuilding and strength training

**FAVOURITE MOVE:**
Hip thrust

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"The Dundas Peak nature trail in Hamilton is a nice 40-minute hike, and you can see the whole city."

**"AS A KID, I WAS NEVER INTO SPORTS.** The gym has always been my way of staying active. One day, a couple of friends suggested that I post my workouts. I started by putting a few on Instagram but soon deactivated my account. I doubted that people would be interested in what I had to offer, but then I thought to myself, *Who's to say there isn't room for me?* When the gyms closed because of the pandemic, things really took off. And, while Instagram is a good place for getting discovered—that's how I got on the Netflix show *Dated & Related*—I never imagined I'd be on TikTok. I was late to download it and thought it was silly at first. But I'm so glad I started. In 2021, I was working at a digital health care company, but because of social media, I was able to quit my job and devote myself full-time to online coaching and working with brands through paid posts and collaborations."

## Jose Lopez

THE FITNESS DAD
@JOSELOPEZ_FIT

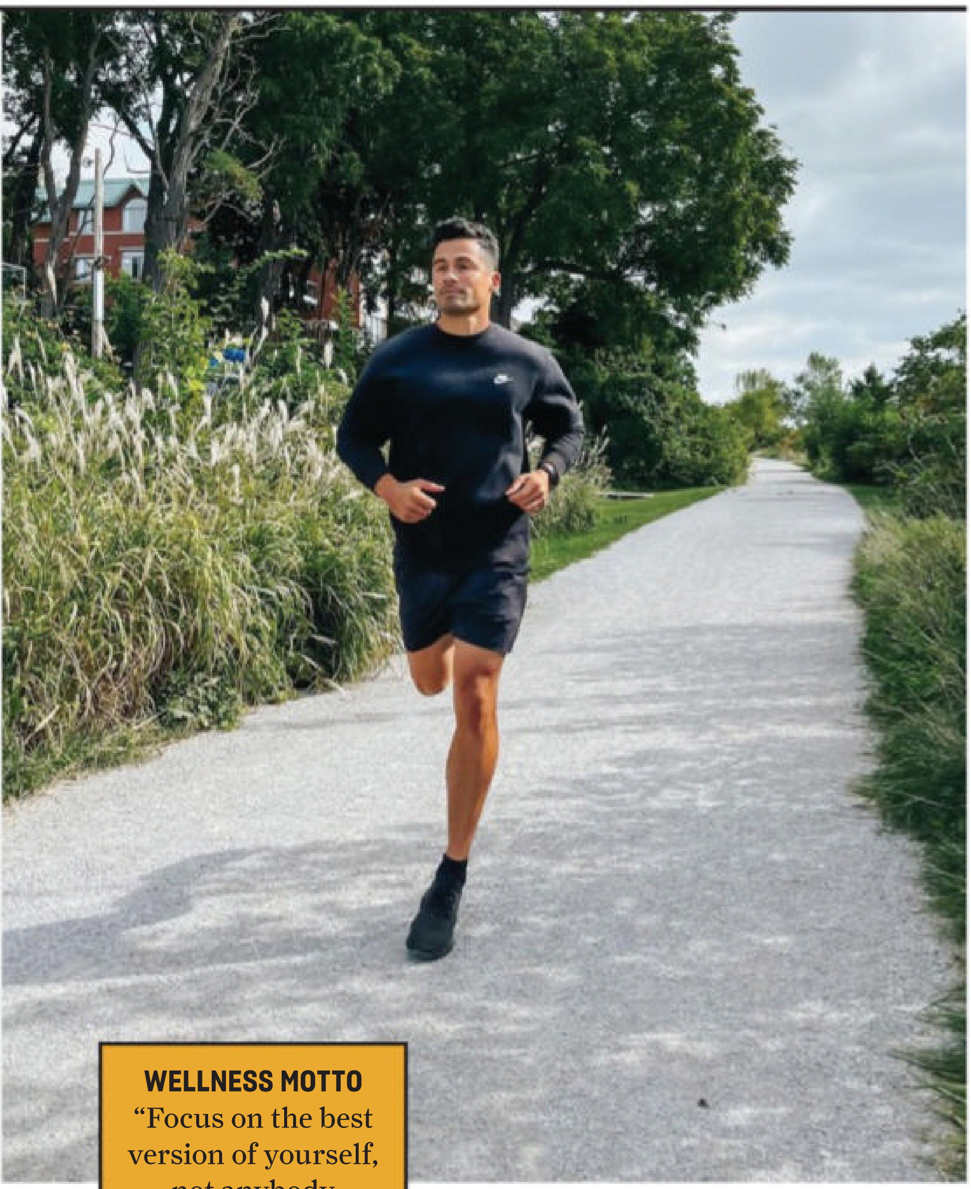
**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** Instagram
**FOLLOWERS:** 18.8K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Circuit training with purposeful movement

**FAVOURITE MOVE:**
Lunge single-arm dumbbell press

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"Riverdale Park has one of the steepest hills in the city. After a few sprints, running on level ground will be a breeze."

**"I STUMBLED INTO FITNESS** when I was a teenager. My older brother got a gym membership, so I joined too. I had no idea it would become my life's passion. I started my Instagram more than five years ago. It seemed like a great way to share the knowledge I had acquired over the years. Now I'm a father, and I realize that, with kids, it's a lot harder to find the time to train regularly. It's important to listen to your body and do what you can, when you can, with whatever time you have. If the baby kept you up all night, a long stretching session might be perfect for that day."



**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"Focus on the best version of yourself, not anybody else's version."

PERFETTO COURTESY OF @JULIAPERFETTO VIA INSTAGRAM,
LOPEZ COURTESY OF @JOSELOPEZ_FIT VIA INSTAGRAM

# Alex Boross-Harmer

THE MENTAL HEALTH TRAINER
@ABH_MOVEMENT

**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** TikTok
**FOLLOWERS:** 239.5K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Mental-health focused fitness

**FAVOURITE MOVE:**
Lying perfectly still

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"Going for a walk in High Park, disconnecting and just enjoying nature can do wonders for mental health."

**"I TELL MY CLIENTS** I'm an anti-fitness fitness coach. All of that 'Push yourself,' 'Go harder,' 'Drop and give me 20'—I throw all of that language out the window. Anything you've ever learned about fitness in terms of repetition counting or pushing the weight? That doesn't matter unless you're training for the Olympics.

"I was an early TikTok adopter and went viral with a challenge where I shared a bunch of my traumas. I really love the TikToks that use sound clips, like the Taylor Swift 'Hi, I'm the problem, it's me.' That's the energy I identify with. I try to do everything mindfully and from a well-intentioned place, so if I don't have anything important or helpful to say, I'm not going to post anything. I put out content that I hope will make a difference in someone's life."

**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"Fitness is a place to be unapologetically selfish."

**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"You need to be flexible and adaptable with your training."

# Beverley Cheng

THE RUGBY PLAYER
@BEVERLEYCHENG

**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** Instagram
**FOLLOWERS:** 186K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Athletic functional training

**FAVOURITE MOVE:**
Dumbbell snatch

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"I like going to City Place for outdoor workouts in the summer because they have a big set of stairs, a turf field and a hill."

**"SPORTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN** a big part of my life. In high school I got into rugby, and at the University of British Columbia I played on the varsity team and represented BC at the provincial level. When I graduated, I was still in love with fitness. Friends kept asking me for workout tips. And after I moved to Toronto, my Instagram following started to grow. I went from giving out free programs to feeling confident enough to start charging for them.

"What keeps my audience interested is that, no matter what, I stick with the same values and I share it all. I show them how hard I work out but also when I have a greasy brunch."

BOROSS-HARMER COURTESY OF @ABH_MOVEMENT VIA INSTAGRAM, CHENG COURTESY OF @BEVERLEYCHENG VIA INSTAGRAM

## Raquel Benitah

THE BODY POSITIVITY ADVOCATE
@RAQUELBENITAH

**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** TikTok
**FOLLOWERS:** 26.2K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Crossfit and weightlifting

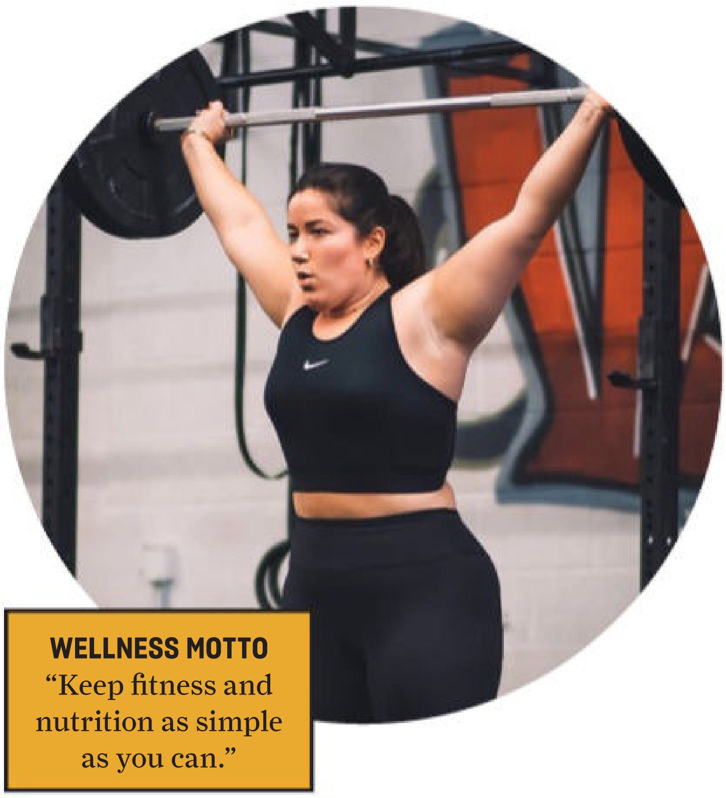
**FAVOURITE MOVES:**
Squats and cleans

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"Vaughan Strength and Conditioning is amazing. I've never been to a gym that has such supportive members."

**"I GREW UP IN A LARGE BODY,** and I got bullied for that. I've gained weight, I've lost weight, I've had an eating disorder.

"I started a basic fitness Instagram account back when I was in university, but during the pandemic, I switched it up and created one that was about body acceptance. I wanted to show that all bodies are able and welcome to participate in the fitness and nutrition space. We don't all have to be one size. I'm very into weightlifting and promoting that. I show women, especially, that weightlifting won't make you bulky and that it feels so empowering to lift heavier each week. A lot of my followers are motivated by that content. I love how the wellness industry is getting rid of the fat-free era, when even healthy fats like coconut oil and butter were demonized.

"In the past, I wasn't as focused on body acceptance and authenticity. I used to gear my content toward what I thought people wanted to see rather than what I genuinely wanted to show. It felt forced and I wasn't enjoying myself. It's not about following the trends or looking at what other people are doing and recreating that. It's about doing what feels true to me."



**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"Keep fitness and nutrition as simple as you can."

BENITAH COURTESY OF @RAQUELBENITAH VIA INSTAGRAM,
NGUYEN COURTESY OF @BRIAN_NEYUGN VIA INSTAGRAM

**WELLNESS MOTTO**
"Do it whether you feel like it or not."

## Brian Nguyen

THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL PROFESSIONAL
@BRIAN_NEYUGN

**PRIMARY PLATFORM:** TikTok
**FOLLOWERS:** 268K

**WORKOUT SPECIALTY:**
Weight training and calisthenics

**FAVOURITE MOVE:**
Push-ups

**FAVOURITE WORKOUT SPOT:**
"I've been going to Sir Casimir Gzowski Park for 10 years and have made lifelong friends there. It's a great place to meditate and reset your mind."

**"I GREW UP WATCHING MOVIES** like *Troy* and wanting to have the same confidence Brad Pitt seemed to have. So I got into weightlifting and took it seriously. After college, I wanted to use my fitness knowedge to inspire others. I know most people want to build muscle, but if you're not enjoying what you're doing, there's no point in doing it. Say you get your results—it doesn't end there. It's about choosing to prioritize yourself and building lifestyle habits that will last. You're the temple. If you take care of yourself, everything else will come together.

"Right now, TikTok is giving me my biggest reach. I just started posting what I'm passionate about and people began following me for motivation."

THE CHASE

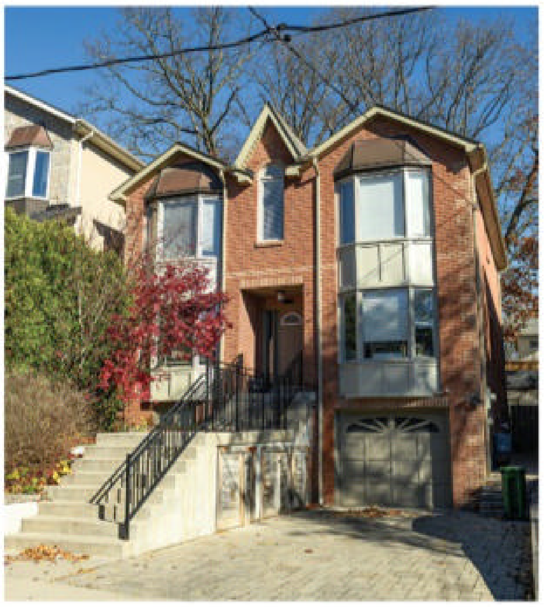
# Westward Bound

## After striking out in the east end, this family shifted their search to Bloor West Village

BY ANDREA YU

**THE BUYERS:** Dani Zacarias, 39, vice-president of community at Skillshare, an e-learning company; Stephen Broadbent, 45, partnerships manager at Shopify; and their two-year-old son, Ash.

**THE STORY:** When the pandemic hit, Dani and Stephen started working from home in their two-bedroom, 930-square-foot Corktown condo. They had Ash that July, and their place started to feel cramped. By summer 2021, they were ready to upsize. They set a budget of $2.1 million and made a wish list: at least three bedrooms, ample outdoor space and enough room to host dinners for their extended family. They also wanted to stay in the east end, where they'd spent almost 10 years and where most of their friends live.



OPTION 1

### WHEELER AVENUE

near Woodbine and Kingston

**Listed at $1,829,000**

**Sold for $2,351,000**

In June 2021, Dani and Stephen viewed this four-bedroom detached house—a play on the classic Toronto bay-and-gable—in the Beaches. There was artificial turf in the backyard, which was odd, but otherwise the place was near-perfect for them. It was close to their friends, spacious yet cozy, and move-in ready. Their agent told them it would go for well over asking, so they made an offer of $2,045,000 but were still outbid by $300,000. Undeterred, they continued their search in the east end, hopeful that something within their budget would surface.

OPTION 2

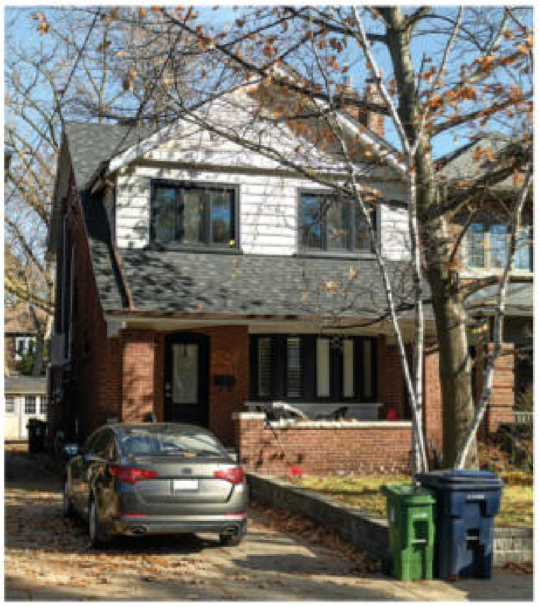
### FIRST AVENUE

near Broadview and Gerrard

**Listed at $1,699,000**

**Sold for $2,327,021**

One week later, they visited this four-bedroom Victorian in Riverside. It had plenty of charm, with arched windows and mature trees, and it was within walking distance of Riverdale and Withrow parks. It had also recently been renovated, but they didn't like the layout, which was a fatal flaw—they wanted to be able to keep an eye on Ash. They considered renovating but knew that would blow their budget, so they moved on without putting in an offer. Landing a spot in the east end was proving more difficult than anticipated.



THE BUY

### ARMADALE AVENUE

near Jane and Annette

**Listed at $1,648,000**

**Sold for $1,940,000**

Dani and Stephen's real estate agent suggested that they look at properties around Bloor West Village. There, in September, they viewed a four-bedroom century home with a wide footprint, which was in stark contrast to the narrow "bowling alley" layouts they'd seen so far. It had an open kitchen and a huge backyard. They offered nearly $300,000 over asking and came out on top, moving in November 2021. Dani says they're loving the west end. "The homes here are close to transit and lots of spectacular green space, like High Park and the Humber River."

PORTRAIT BY EBTI NABAG

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**A WHOLE ROAST LAMB FEAST:** Azhar Kitchen and Bar hosted an intimate dining experience starring a succulent whole roast lamb. TL Insiders were treated to a curated selection of low-intervention wine, signature cocktails, and a meze of dips, salads, cheeses, preserves and other bite-size snacks.

**EVOLUTION OF TALENT STRATEGY:** CB and TL Insiders attended a provocative thought-leadership conversation about the evolution of talent management in Canada. Panellists asked important questions about how to create powerful work cultures, better serve customers and develop the best products in a changing society. In partnership with Amazon Canada, the panel featured Greg Dubejsky, director of international expansion, Amazon Canada; Fatima Zaidi, founder and CEO, Quill; and Daneal Charney, executive-in-residence, momentum, MaRS Discovery District.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **GEORGE PIMENTEL PHOTOGRAPHY**

**CELEBRATING DIWALI:** Curryish Tavern invited TL Insiders to celebrate its first Diwali, India's festival of lights. To mark the occasion, chef Miheer Shete and team indulged guests with a carefully curated four-course menu paired with Meldville wines and special cocktails.

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**ORGANIC BREAD WORKSHOP:** TL Insiders explored the amazing world of naturally fermented breads and spent three hours with their hands in dough, guided by Prairie Boy Bread owner Grant MacPherson. Guests were sent home with a loaf of bread, fresh dough, a sourdough starter, two kilos of organic flour and Prairie Boy's simple bread-making notes.

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CHILE
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RESERVA
Casillero del Diablo
SAUVIGNON BLANC
CHILE
CONCHA Y TORO
DESDE 1883

FLAVOUR OF THE MONTH

# DUNK CONTEST

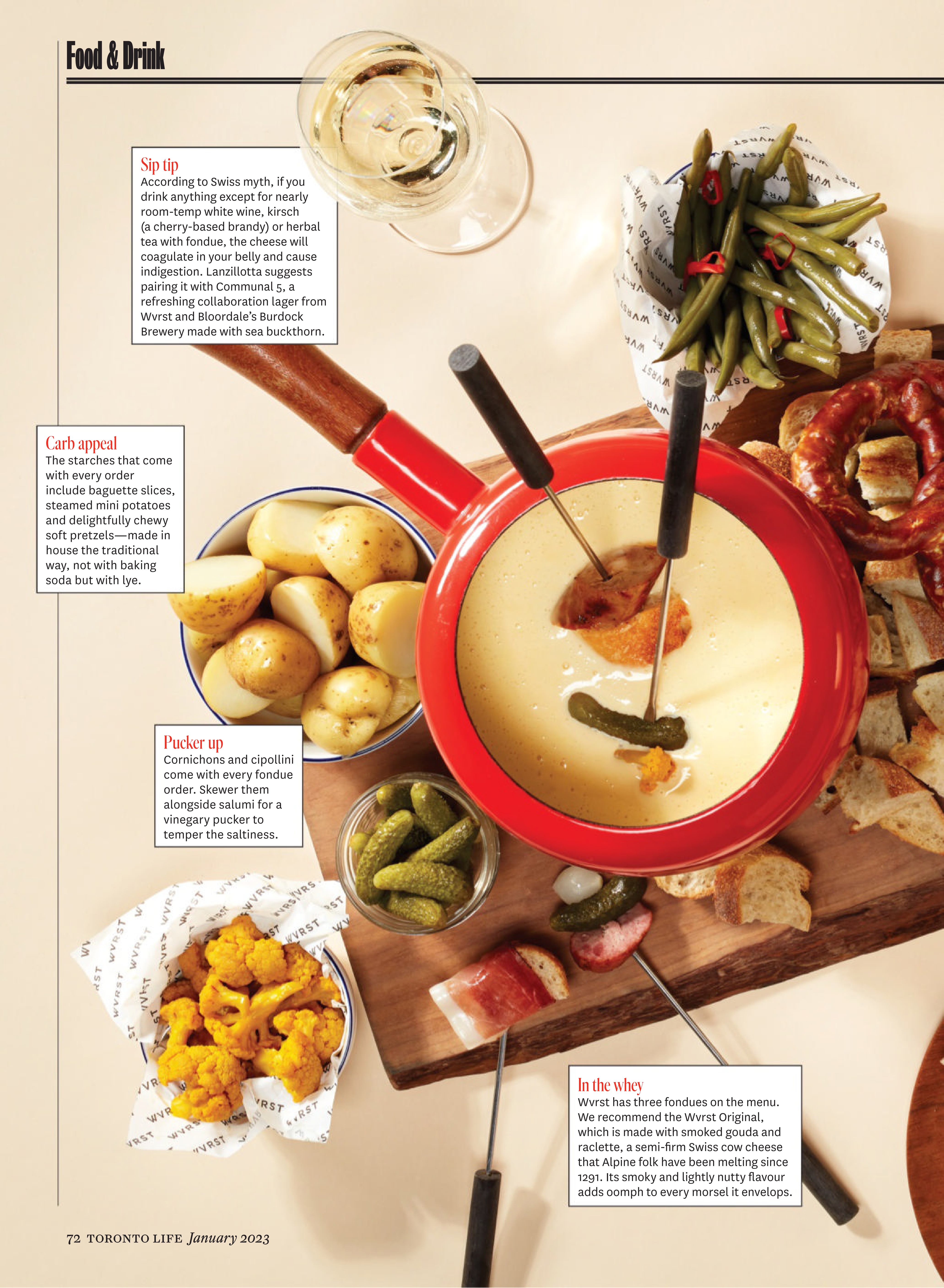
Six of the city’s tangiest, creamiest, cheesiest fondues

BY CAROLINE AKSICH

This extreme close-up of Wvrst’s fondue is almost NSFW

FOOD STYLING BY CAROL DUDAR

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VICKY LAM



## Sip tip

According to Swiss myth, if you drink anything except for nearly room-temp white wine, kirsch (a cherry-based brandy) or herbal tea with fondue, the cheese will coagulate in your belly and cause indigestion. Lanzillotta suggests pairing it with Communal 5, a refreshing collaboration lager from Wvrst and Bloordale's Burdock Brewery made with sea buckthorn.

## Carb appeal

The starches that come with every order include baguette slices, steamed mini potatoes and delightfully chewy soft pretzels—made in house the traditional way, not with baking soda but with lye.

## Pucker up

Cornichons and cipollini come with every fondue order. Skewer them alongside salumi for a vinegary pucker to temper the saltiness.

## In the whey

Wvrst has three fondues on the menu. We recommend the Wvrst Original, which is made with smoked gouda and raclette, a semi-firm Swiss cow cheese that Alpine folk have been melting since 1291. Its smoky and lightly nutty flavour adds oomph to every morsel it envelops.

**FOR A MULTITUDE OF MIX-INS**

## WVRST

**IN THE ALPS,** they know the secret to beating the winter blues: cheese. Specifically, the comforting goodness that is fondue. In Toronto, you can eat this dopamine-boosting dish year-round at Wvrst, the German-inspired sausage house and beer hall. What's bubbling away in their vintage enamel pots may be the main draw, but the accoutrements are up there too: wild game sausage, freshly baked pretzels and Italian salumi are just a few of the dunkables on offer. "Because of our communal setup, Wvrst always has a celebratory energy—even on a Wednesday, it feels like a party here," says chef-owner Aldo Lanzillotta. "Adding fondue to our menu just seemed like a natural progression: it's a sharing dish that's so much fun to eat." Serves two to four. $44 (with potatoes, cornichons, pickled onions, pretzel and baguette), extra for other add-ons. *wvrst.com*

### In a pickle

House-made pickled veg, like garlic green beans and curried cauliflower, can be added to any order. These palate cleansers cut through the fat and provide a crunchy contrast to all that unctuous cheese.

### Sausage party

There are two dozen house-made sausages on offer here. We recommend accentuating a spread with any of the following links, in order of most to least indulgent: duck and foie gras, Calabrian-chili-studded Tamworth pork, Kranjska (a smoked pork-and-beef Polish sausage) or, for something a little leaner, bison blueberry maple.

### More meat

The charcuterie selection veers Italian: spicy soppressata from Abruzzo, prosciutto cotto from Lombardy and speck from Trentino-Alto Adige. It's not all salumi, though. Seasonally available cured delicacies include Ontario summer sausage, Spanish Iberian chorizo and Swiss brési.

### Fon-dos and don'ts

- The oldest diner takes the first dip.
- Don't stir counterclockwise. Traditionalists say it ruins the cheese's texture. Only clockwise, figure eight or zigzag is acceptable.
- To keep the table tidy, twirl, don't tap, the fly-away cheese strands, and rest your fondue fork on your plate when not in use.
- At the end of the meal, the crusty cheese at the bottom of the pot—called la religieuse ("the nun")—is the best part, so scrape off every last morsel by any means necessary.
- Don't lose any bread in the cheese. Whoever does gets stuck with the bill.

# Five more fondues worth dipping into

**FOR FINE DINER-ING**

## LE SWAN

**GET COZY** in a booth at this frozen-in-time diner-slash-French-bistro on Queen West. Once available only on the late-night menu, Le Swan's fondue can now be ordered as an early bird supper—because not only night owls should have the pleasure. The addition of mozzarella to the traditional blend of Gruyère and Swiss lends a visually pleasing cheesy pull to the melted mix. Comes with hunks of toasted Pullman loaf for dipping, with the option to add roasted broccoli. Serves four. $50. *leswan.ca*

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**FOR A VEGAN FON-DUPE**

## AVELO

**THANKS TO SOME CULINARY** alchemy, cashews, Roquefort mould cultures and five weeks in a cheese cave that's never seen so much as a drop of dairy, chef Fernando Anrango has created a phenomenal faux fondue. Served in a mini sourdough bagel bread bowl, this dairy-free dip starts off funky and tangy and ends with the tingling warmth of white pepper. As the opener to Avelo's multi-course winter tasting menu, it sets the bar high for what follows. Tasting menus from $110 a person. *avelorestaurant.com*

**FOR AN ALPINE EXPERIENCE**

## BAR PIQUETTE

**THIS TRAD SWISS FONDUE** (Gruyère, Emmental and Appenzeller) is best eaten in the solarium, a glass-encased winter garden that's kept toasty (albeit a few degrees below the dining room). Snuggle up in one of the blankets provided and enjoy the ideal venue—basically an inverse snow globe—in which to savour this Alpine staple, served with summer sausage, apple or pear, radishes, pickles, and sourdough. Serves two. $46. *barpiquette.com*

**FOR A TRIP TO FUNKYTOWN**

## CAREN'S

**THIS ROSEDALE BISTRO** has two savoury options: a classic Emmental-Gruyère blend and something a bit bolder. Their mix of Danish blue cheese, Ontario double-cream brie and kirsch has just the right hint of funk. A sweet morsel—like a hunk of the walnut raisin bread the fondue comes with—makes for a perfectly balanced bite. Serves two to four. $30. *carensrosedale.com*

**FOR UTENSIL-FREE FUN**

## CLUNY

**PROVING THAT FONDUE** can be finger food, this French restaurant in the Distillery District serves a pot of melted La Sauvagine (a Québécois washed-rind cow's milk cheese) with deep-fried asparagus. The spears are breaded in sourdough crumbs, providing ample texture for the creamy goodness to glom onto. Serves one. $23. *clunybistro.com*

LE SWAN COURTESY OF GRAYDON HERRIOTT, BAR PIQUETTE COURTESY OF BAR PIQUETTE, CLUNY'S COURTESY OF DISTILLERY RESTAURANTS CORPORATION

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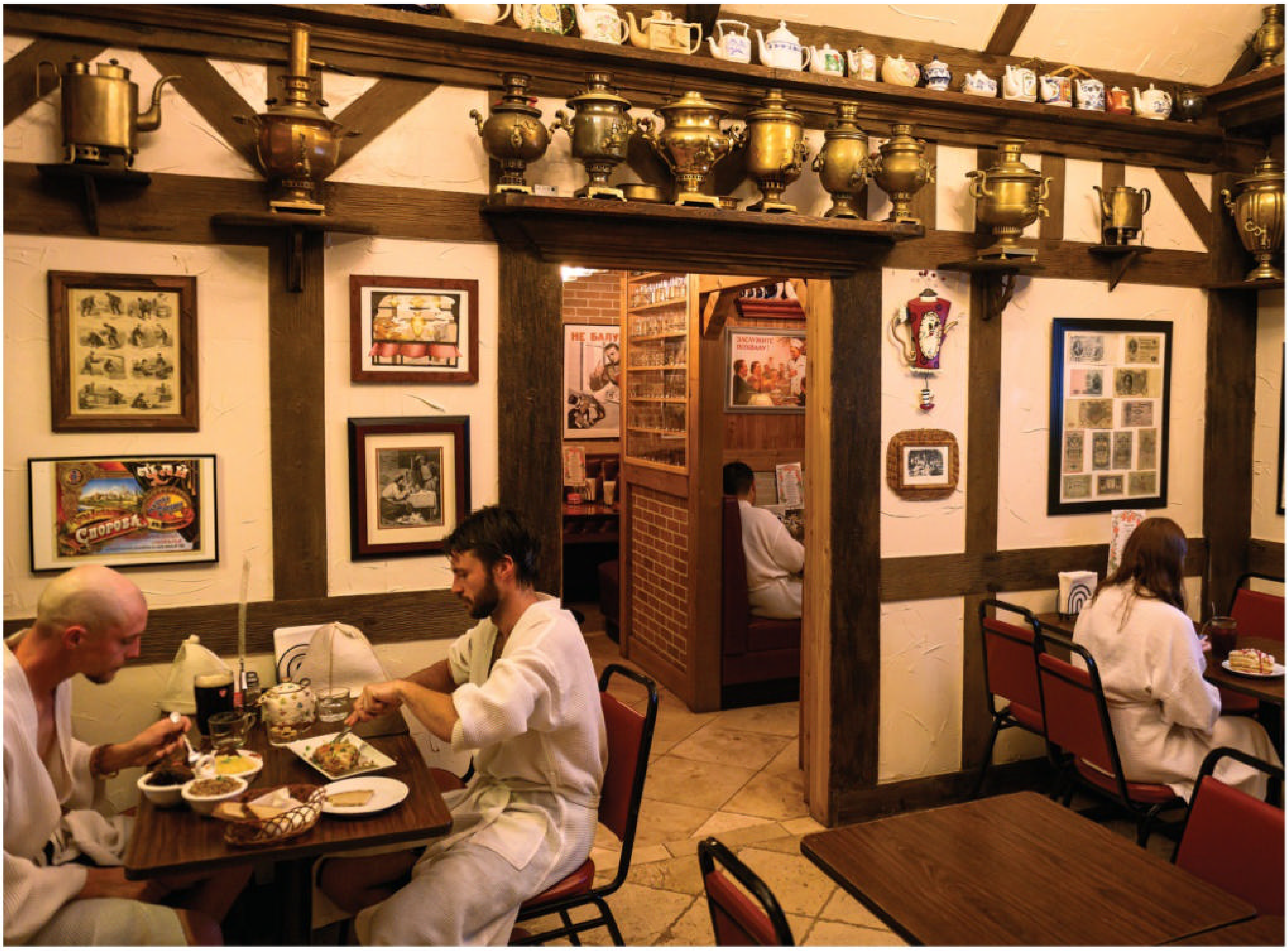


PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL NEUHAUS

SORT-OF SECRET

# Hot in Here

At this Mississauga banya, Russian owners and a Ukrainian chef work together to provide the perfect cold-weather comforts

BY LIZA AGRBA

**THE SORT-OF SECRET:** South-Western Bathhouse and Tea Room, a Russian banya (sauna) and restaurant in Mississauga

**YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF IT IF:** You've been fortunate enough to have an Eastern European friend or family member introduce you to the tradition

**BUT YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T TRIED IT BECAUSE:** It's tucked around the side of a plaza, with only a red canopy over the door to signal its existence

A decade after immigrating from southern Russia to Toronto, Valentina and Victor Tourianski were invited to a friend's makeshift backyard banya. "We had fun, but it wasn't built properly—it was just a metal stove in a shed," says Valentina. "Later that night, Victor said, 'I can build a better banya.'"

He did, and it quickly became the place to be for family and friends. The conviviality reminded them of home. Saunas are, beyond all their reputed health benefits, about community building; they're the social glue of Russian culture.

Soon afterward, Victor, a construction worker, was injured on the job. In search of a new income source, the couple started thinking about getting into the banya business for real. Finding a location wasn't easy—there's a long-standing stigma around bathhouses—but they managed to secure a space and opened the South-Western Bathhouse and Tea Room in 2012, a slice of rural Russia just west of the 427.

"Our goal was to introduce this beautiful tradition to Canadians," says Valentina. And, 10 years later, the vast majority of their clients are non-Russian. That said, it's a complicated time to run a business that revolves around Russian culture. The Tourianskis are staunchly opposed to Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, but they maintain a strong connection to their country. Fortunately, their customers have been understanding. "What's happening in Ukraine is absolutely terrible," says Valentina. "But that doesn't mean I stop being Russian. This is my culture."

The spa services are only half of the experience here. In the Tudor-style dining room—decorated with vintage Soviet posters and samovars—red-faced guests in white terry cloth robes and conical felt hats (to protect from overheating) chat over cups of complimentary tea and tuck into post-steam sustenance.

Victor, a passionate cook who used to own a sausage business back home, works alongside Ukrainian chef Mykhailo Voitovych. Together, they serve a menu of dishes from Russia and across the former Soviet Union.

There's the transcendent chakhokhbili, a Georgian chicken-and-potato stew. The borscht is another hit: beef stock, simmered for at least six hours, is the key, according to Valentina, whose specialty is the beet-based soup. Also on the menu is the colourfully named Herring Under a Fur Coat salad—the "coat" consists of mayonnaise, onion, potatoes, carrots, eggs and beets. The fish dish is a classic Russian recipe that's traditionally served during the holidays, especially on New Year's Eve.

Salo—razor-thin slices of frozen pork fatback served with squares of nutty rye bread—is a popular post-steam snack that goes best with a frosty pint of Czech lager. For something stronger, there's Georgian wine, specialty shots—including a bold blend of vodka, beet juice and Victor's horseradish preserve—and signature cocktails. The Moscow Martini, the star of the cocktail list, comes spiked with punchy pickle brine, widely considered a hangover cure in Russia.

Valentina and Victor recently opened a second, larger location in Richmond Hill that features a Turkish hammam room. At either spa, the correct order is sauna first, then food and finally a vodka shot with a dill pickle chaser that provides a bracing warm-up before heading back into the winter air.

*1. Beverages, alcoholic and not, feature heavily in the menu and include beer, tea and kompot, a juice made with sour cherries and peaches*

*2. A plate of pelmeni, traditional Russian dumplings*

*3. A venik massage involves being repeatedly thwacked with a bundle of oak leaves (it feels better than it sounds)*

*4. Hearty sourdough pancakes called oladi, served with sour cream*

*5. Culinary traditions from across the former Soviet Union—including Georgian, Ukrainian and Armenian food—inspire the rotating menu*

*6. After a stint in the 80-degree wood-fired banya, guests can cool off by soaking themselves with a barrel of icy water*

*7. Or take a dip in the cold-water plunge pool, said to promote clear skin and soothe aching muscles*

*8. The correct way to do ice-cold vodka shots: toast with a "za zdorovie!" ("for your health" in Russian), take a big breath, down the booze in one fell swoop, exhale slowly and then eat the dill pickle*

# Culture

Our picks for the best things to see, do, read and hear this month in Toronto

**MUSIC**

## A raucous, thrilling take on the everyday

**DRY CLEANING**

Jan. 11 | The Phoenix Concert Theatre

→ THE BAND DRY CLEANING has quickly made a name for itself thanks to the stark contrast between Florence Shaw's wryly spoken witticisms and the group's pulsing instrumentation. The 4AD signees are part of a thrilling post-punk revival taking place in the UK—but without the highbrow posturing. Instead, their slice-of-life jams celebrate the humour, chaos and wonder of everyday life. In their album *Stumpwork*, the quartet showcases the mesmerizing expansiveness of their sound, making each deadpan observation feel revelatory.

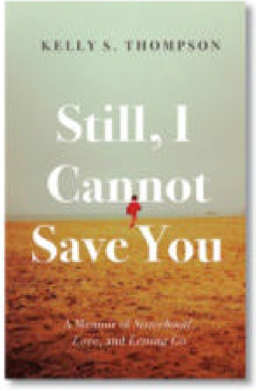
## A long-overdue dinner date

**FESTIVAL**

**Winterlicious**

Jan. 27 to Feb.9 | Various locations

WINTERLICIOUS MAKES its tasty, triumphant return to Toronto in 2023 after a two-year hiatus—and participating restaurants promise to rise to the occasion. In this taste-your-own-adventure tour of the city, expect set menus and ambitious one-off recipes specially crafted for the event. Then there's the ambiance: after last winter's patchwork approach to indoor dining, it'll be a blast to support local talent and enjoy the company of old friends over hot new dishes.



## A memoir about the bond between sisters

**BOOKS**

***Still, I Cannot Save You***
**by Kelly S. Thompson**
Out Jan. 31

OFTEN, IT'S AFTER we've lost a loved one that we see them most clearly. In Kelly S. Thompson's new memoir, she delivers a heartfelt and honest portrait of her older sister, Meghan, who died in 2018. Told with sibling love and the dark humour that bonded them, Thompson's story revisits their childhood, when their relationship first faced some of its deepest challenges as Meghan began to struggle with addiction. As the years go by, a distance grows between them. But, when Meghan discovers she has terminal cancer after the birth of her second child, the sisters come together again. *Still, I Cannot Save You* is equal parts heartbreaking and hilarious—a compelling account of enduring love by the author of the best-selling *Girls Need Not Apply*.

DRY CLEANING COURTESY OF DRY CLEANING

## A play about war and the weather

**THEATRE**

***Pressure***

Jan. 24 to Mar. 5 | Royal Alexandra Theatre

KEVIN DOYLE, the lovable sad-sack Molesley of *Downton Abbey*, makes the switch from footman to weatherman in this real-life Second World War drama. Doyle stars as Scottish meteorologist James Stagg, whose crucial forecasting was key to the success of the D-Day invasion of 1944. As the Allies prepared to cross the English Channel and liberate Europe from the Nazis, the massive operation hinged on the contrary predictions of Stagg and his hotshot American counterpart, Irving P. Krick. David Haig's play, a hit in London's West End in 2018, is finally making its pandemic-delayed North American debut in Toronto.

## A nostalgia-infused breakout

**MUSIC**

**Suki Waterhouse**

Jan. 24 | The Axis Club

Suki Waterhouse's Coolest Place in the World Tour arrives to town in support of her 2022 debut album *I Can't Let Go*. After conquering modelling and acting, the English artist is making her mark in music with downtempo pop. "Moves," the bold yet ghostly opening track, showcases her range. Her chops will be on full display in the upcoming miniseries adaptation of *Daisy Jones & The Six*.

## A trade show about intelligent design

**SHOW**

**Interior Design Show**

Jan. 19 to 22 | Metro Toronto Convention Centre

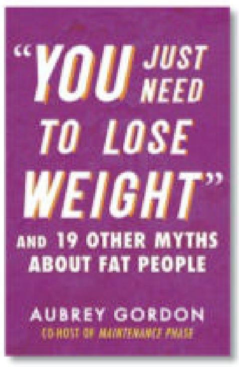
WHAT IS THE ROLE of design in our climate-crisis-beleaguered world? That's the question at this year's IDS. The event's theme is Moving Parts, which challenges designers to create products using eco-conscious materials. Sustainable standing desk, anyone?

## A myth-busting guide to fatphobia

**BOOKS**

***"You Just Need To Lose Weight"***
***and 19 Other Myths About Fat People***
**by Aubrey Gordon**
Out Jan. 10

"YOU CAN LOSE WEIGHT if you just work out hard enough," "Just watch your calories and you'll lose weight," "Fat acceptance encourages people to become obese"—these are just a few of the myths Aubrey Gordon combats in her new book. The author and activist, who describes herself as "very fat," provides her readers with the science behind weight loss and fatphobia, equipping them with the tools to recognize and help dismantle anti-fat prejudice. This book encourages deep thinking about how society treats plus-size people.


"YOU JUST NEED TO LOSE WEIGHT"
AND 19 OTHER MYTHS ABOUT FAT PEOPLE
AUBREY GORDON
CO-HOST OF MAINTENANCE PHASE

MEC
EXPLORER/EVI

**MUSEUM**

## An inspirational interactive tour

**INDIGENOUS INGENUITY**

Until Apr. 26 | Ontario Science Centre

➜ EXPLORING INDIGENOUS scientific teachings has become a fun-filled family activity at the Ontario Science Centre. A friendly bear and a mischievous trickster help visitors navigate a virtual canoe race, build an igloo and test a kayak's centre of gravity during a knowledge-boosting interactive quest. Most importantly, participants learn to appreciate both the natural world as a continuous source of inspiration and the wisdom of oral tradition. A valuable reminder that Indigenous knowledge is timeless.

*PRESSURE* BY ROBERT DAY, KAYAKERS COURTESY OF THE ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE

## A local singer-songwriter's homecoming

**MUSIC**

**Ruby Waters**

Jan. 28 | The Opera House

MÉTIS-SLOVAK musician Ruby Waters is riding high following her 2022 Juno nomination and setting out on a North American tour that concludes in Toronto. For fans of Charlotte Cardin and Jessie Reyez, Waters brings a similar disarming singer-songwriter edge to the realm of pop. Songs like the bittersweet "Quantum Physics" are built around her acoustic guitar, right down to percussion that mimics the way her palm mutes the strings. It's worth catching Waters in such an intimate space—her next visit to the city is bound to be a stadium show.

## An intergenerational novel about cultural identity

**BOOKS**

***The Broken Heart of Winter***

**by Judy LeBlanc**

Out Jan. 27

AWARD-WINNING author Judy LeBlanc tells the story of three generations of Acadian women. Despite living on opposite coasts, they are connected by shared hardship, exile and a French musket passed down through the family. Poignant prose and vivid characters bring this story of resilience to life.

## A delightfully anthropomorphic play

**THEATRE**

***Fifteen Dogs***

Jan. 10 to Feb. 5 | Guloien Theatre

ANDRÉ ALEXIS'S brilliant 2015 novel follows a pack of Toronto canines endowed by the gods with human intelligence in an experiment to see how they cope with complex thought. Their enlightened adventures—from discovering poetry to grappling with the knowledge of mortality—come to the stage in a new dramatization by Crow's Theatre.

## An old-timey freak show—without the exploitation

**SHOW**

**Something Strange Sideshow**

Jan. 15 | Revival

SOMETHING STRANGE this way comes—the Something Strange Sideshow festival, that is. Canada's largest sideshow event features performers from the Coney Island Circus Sideshow in Brooklyn: strongmen, sword swallowers, mentalists and self-described "pain-proof freaks." Burlesque queen Kita St. Cyr and daredevil Alaska the Lost Boy are also poised to make unforgettable appearances. Finally, a whack of oddities and curiosities are sure to amaze and, more than likely, provoke some serious gross-outs.

**CONCERT**

## A candlelit string quartet

**CANDLELIGHT: VIVALDI FOUR SEASONS**

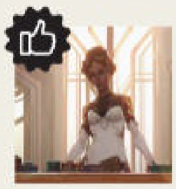
Jan. 13 | Metropolitan Community Church

➜ FEW MUSICAL ENSEMBLES can capture the sombre romance of January quite like a string quartet. Add a few hundred candles, a Gothic-looking church and Vivaldi's most famous set of seasonal concertos (in G minor) and you've got the makings of a stirring winter's night. The folks at Candlelight present a unique multisensory concert experience. In 65 minutes, ticket holders will take a journey through the four seasons—from buoyant, jubilant spring to stately, slightly bleak winter—led by the Listeso String Quartet.

WATERS BY ADRIAN HARASOWSKI, SIDESHOW BY JESSE LAMBERT/ARCH ANGEL STUDIOS. CANDLELIGHT COURTESY OF FEVER

## What Torontonians are watching and listening to right now

**PHATT AL**
Comedian,
Second City



**ARCANE**

"The art and storytelling in this animated series are truly mind-blowing. I've watched it five times; it's hauntingly moving, with lots of cool steampunk inspiration and incredibly creative action. It's based on the *League of Legends* video game, and the Imagine Dragons soundtrack is dope."

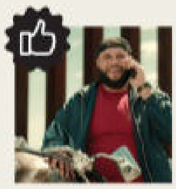
**LEXIE BUCHANAN**
Digital Content
Specialist, AGO

DESERT
ISLAND
DISCS

**DESERT ISLAND DISCS**

"During my commute from Hamilton to the AGO, the BBC's *Desert Island Discs* podcast is my jam. It satiates my never-ending curiosity about others' lives by asking notable people which eight songs they'd bring to a deserted island. No matter who's speaking, be it Zadie Smith or Jens Stoltenberg, I'm gripped."

**FARZANA DOCTOR**
Author



**MO**

"This series, co-created by comedian Mo Amer, about a Houston-based Palestinian family seeking asylum, takes issues like refugee trauma and makes them into binge-worthy comedy. As an immigrant, I love the tender take on dislocation and the seamless switch from Arabic to English."

AL BY TIM LEYES, *ARCANE* COURTESY OF NETFLIX, BUCHANAN COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT, DOCTOR COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT, *MO* COURTESY OF NETFLIX, KHULLAR BY GETTY IMAGES *FALL ON YOUR KNEES* COURTESY OF CANADIAN STAGE

**THEATRE**

# A beloved novel turned two-part play

***FALL ON YOUR KNEES PART ONE: FAMILY TREE***

Jan. 20 to Feb. 4 | Bluma Appel Theatre

➜ ACTOR-PLAYWRIGHT Ann-Marie MacDonald made the jump to bestselling author back in the '90s with her novel about four Nova Scotian sisters and their dark family secrets. Now, a quarter-century later, it's hitting the stage in an epic two-part adaptation written by Hannah Moscovitch and directed by Alisa Palmer. A co-production between five theatre companies, the show kicks off at Toronto's Canadian Stage with *Part One: Family Tree* and *Part Two: The Diary* playing on alternate evenings.

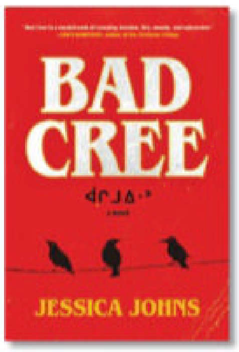
## A gripping mystery about communal violence

**BOOKS**

***Bad Cree* by Jessica Johns**

Out Jan. 10

JESSICA JOHNS'S debut novel, based on her award-winning short story of the same name, exists somewhere between waking and dreaming. It tells the haunting tale of Mackenzie, a Cree woman grieving the loss of a family member. When text messages begin to arrive from beyond the grave, she sets off on a search for answers and is forced to confront the legacy of violence that has affected her family and community.



## A stand-up show that pulls no punches

**COMEDY**

**Sugar Sammy**

Jan. 28 | John Bassett Theatre

MONTREAL'S SAMIR KHULLAR—or, as he's known in the comedy scene, Sugar Sammy—delivers hilarious stand-up routines in a mix of English, French, Punjabi and Hindi. Drawing from his own experiences as a second-generation immigrant in Canada, he has ample fodder for laughs. And he's happy to pick on everyone—the French and the English along with overbearing Indian parents.

# The Race of My Life

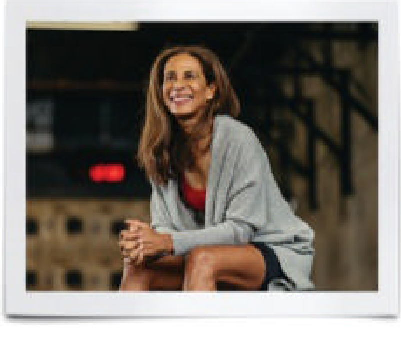
After losing my son, I found strength competing in an Ironman Triathlon. But first I had to face my overwhelming fear of swimming

BY LYNN KEANE

**OVER THE PAST 22 YEARS,** I've run 15 marathons, including the famous Boston race six times. For me, running isn't just about exhilaration and exercise; it's about resilience in the face of heartbreak. In 2009, my husband, Bruce, and I lost our 23-year-old son, Daniel, to suicide. Running helped me through the grief.

Daniel brought warmth and exuberance to our lives with his big, beautiful smile. He was a great cook despite his severe food allergies, and he loved to tease me. Before he died, I told him I wanted to compete in a triathlon. "But you're not a swimmer, Mom!" he said. He was right—I loved the water, but I'd panic if I swam too far out into a lake or ocean. After losing Daniel, once I felt emotionally stronger, I decided to challenge that fear.

My first training swim went horribly wrong. I swam out into the middle of a lake in Hamilton and then, looking back at the shore, I froze. My limbs went limp and I felt like I was sinking. My coach and another swimmer had to help me back to the beach. I was so shaken that I stopped swimming altogether for a few years. But my determination to succeed eventually trumped my fear. Over time, I learned how to calm myself with deep breathing. I also visited a hypnotherapy clinic in Toronto, which created an audio recording that encouraged me to "become the fish"—I listened to it every night for weeks. I slowly found my way into the lake at our cottage, and in 2015, I completed my first half Ironman. As I crossed the finish line, I thought of Daniel. That night, I went to sleep knowing that, one day, I would complete a full Ironman: a 3.9-kilometre swim, 180-kilometre bike and 42.2-kilometre run.



During my first training swim, my limbs went limp. I felt like I was sinking

Two years later, in July of 2018, I arrived in Lake Placid, New York, to compete in the biggest race of my life. My goal was simple: finish within 17 hours, the cut-off time. On race day, I woke up at 4 a.m. to give myself time to eat, digest and settle my nerves. I have ulcerative colitis, which causes inflammation and ulcers in my digestive tract. To avoid any problems on the course, I stuck to a simple breakfast: a plain bagel, peanut butter, a banana and tea. Then I collected my gear—shorts and a tank top, water bottles, a wetsuit, goggles, a chip to record my time—and made my way down to the beach.

Everyone seemed to be descending toward the water at once. The noise and commotion messed with my head. Somehow, Bruce and our two daughters, who had accompanied me on the trip, spotted me among a thousand pink bathing caps and black wetsuits. My youngest daughter slipped a bracelet around my wrist and said, "To help you conjure strength."

I joined the throng of triathletes moving farther down the beach and waited nervously for the race to begin. When the green light flashed, I ran into the water and started swimming. During my first strokes, I felt Daniel with me. I tried to stay present and focus on the next stroke. I drafted behind other swimmers to help save energy. At one point, someone's arm hit my head. I got mad, but then I let it go. Sooner than I thought, I was halfway done. I had no sense of time, but I didn't care. It was the most enjoyable swim of my life. Touching the sandy bottom at the end, I was proud of myself. I had become the fish.

There was no time to linger during the transition period. I changed into my bike gear and started cycling. The first loop of the bike course was windy and rainy, but I felt strong and in control as I whipped down an eight-kilometre descent. With over 1,060 metres of elevation gain on each loop, it wasn't any single climb but the sum of many that made it such a tough course. My family's cheers made the final climbs seem easier. After eight hours, 10 minutes and 55 seconds, I changed into my running shoes for the final leg.

I was pumped to tackle the running course. *I can handle this,* I thought. *I'm a marathoner!* That confidence lasted exactly five kilometres, after which the food I'd consumed on the bike started causing stomach cramps so intense that I couldn't even drink water. I began speed walking. My neck, hips and legs were sore from such a long time on the bike, and my mind was telling me to stop. I considered the possibility of not being able to complete the race. But getting a DNF (Did Not Finish) was not an option. Night fell, and even though my watch had run out of battery, I knew I was racing against the clock.

When I made it to the bottom of the last hill, Bruce and my eldest daughter were waiting for me. They assured me that I would finish in time. My eyes welled up in relief as we exchanged quick hugs. I made my way over to the finishing chute, which was lined with a red carpet. Under the stars, I crossed the finish line and raised my hand skyward. I thanked Daniel for encouraging me and my husband and daughters for helping me turn my impossible dream into a reality. I heard the announcer call out my name: "Lynn Keane from Oakville, Ontario, you are an Ironman!" My time was 15 hours and 46 minutes.

The next morning, I was elated to discover that I'd placed fifth in my age group. Even though my body hurt everywhere, I was riding an incredible high. Faced with one of life's most heartbreaking experiences, I had challenged my mind and body and succeeded. I know Daniel would have been proud.

*Lynn Keane is a speaker and author in Oakville, Ontario.*

*Email submissions to memoir@torontolife.com*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEN NG

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THE RIVER BALL

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